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# FAMILY MEMBERS of Will Marion Cook: Biographical Materials for immediate family members

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11/02/2018

## **FAMILY MEMBERS of Will Marion Cook: Biographical Materials for immediate family members**

This document is a supplement to "Chronology and Itinerary of the Career of Will Marion Cook," a 2017 document which is mounted on-line at <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/musicfacpub/66/>. It pre-supposes some familiarity with the "Chronology and Itinerary," and puts into some kind of order a number of additional research notes, principally drawing upon newspaper and genealogy databases, that amplify the earlier work in certain respects regarding the public lives of his immediate family members. This is not a finished, polished effort; it represents work in progress, complete with repetitions, missing data, and the occasional typographical error. I invite queries, amplifications, and corrections, which may be directed to plefferts1@unl.edu. The present document is a first draft of November 2018.

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Will Marion Cook (1869-1944) had an extraordinary and celebrated career as composer, conductor, arranger, orchestrator, producer, director, violinist, pianist, librettist and lyricist, author, and educator. He was one of the foremost American musicians of his generation, and was regarded by many in the African American community of his day as its leading composer. His work as composer and performer frequently intersected with the creative careers of other members of his immediate family. The present document pulls together in one place some basic data on these individuals so important to him.

His was a family whose members clearly belonged to the black elite. They were in the Talented Tenth, to use the W. E. B. Du Bois term, or the "Black 400" of Washington society, to use another point of reference. See, inter alia, Elizabeth Dowling Taylor, The Original Black Elite: Daniel Murray and the Story of a Forgotten Era (New York: Amistad, 2017), Willard B. Gatewood, Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920 (Urbana: Indiana University Press, 1990), or <http://www.edwardianpromenade.com/african-american/social-washington-the-colored-aristocracy/> (accessed 15 December 2017).

Cook had strong family ties to the Midwest. On his father's side, his family was from the Detroit area. His mother's DC obituary says of her family members that they were "all residents of Cleveland, at different times, many years ago. They have the earnest sympathy of friends here [in DC], in Ohio and Michigan, and many other parts of the North and the South" (Cleveland Gazette, March 3, 1923, p. 2).

Despite his rows with his wife Abbie Mitchell (and their divorce, and her other two marriages) Cook and Mitchell stayed close, and performed together in the US and Europe, over most of the remainder of his career. Cook also stayed very close to his stepfather,

mother, and two brothers. He was close to both of his children, son Mercer and daughter Marion, and son-in-law Louis Douglas, and their surviving child, his granddaughter Marion. He provided for his first grandson (son Mercer's first son) in his will. He was close to his nephews and nieces, and to his cousin Cora Parchment (with whose family he had lived in Oberlin, OH).

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**Pretty basic biographical data is presented below for:**

Father: John Hartwell Cook  
 Mother: Isabel (Belle) Cook Howard  
 Step-Father: James H. Howard  
 Older Brother: John Hartwell Cook  
 Niece: Louise Cook  
 Nephew: Lenoir Cook  
 Younger Brother: Hugh Oliver (Ollie) Cook  
 Nephew: John Hartwell (Hartie) Cook  
 Wife: Abbie Mitchell  
 Daughter: Marion Cook  
 Son-in-Law: Louis Douglas  
 Son: Mercer Cook

**And these are followed by:**

Some addresses for Cook and his family members, and including some neighbors in Washington, DC (Adams, Dunbar, Ellington, Europe), with an aside about the important Cook-Dunbar personal relationship.

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## FATHER

Will Marion Cook's father is John Hartwell Cook (1838-1879) of Wyandotte, Michigan, just south of Detroit; a Michigan birthplace for their father is provided on passport applications by Cook and also his brother Oliver, but the US 1850 and 1870 Census say their father was born in Virginia, as do other US Census entries. Detroit as the family home makes sense for other reasons, as below.

By one report, his father's family emigrated from Fredericksburg, Va. to Detroit in 1848. Will Marion Cook memoir (Carter thesis, p. 386) says the move from Fredericksburg, Va. to Detroit took place around 1830. John Hartwell Cook was a shoemaker, and the son of Major Cook (1808-1872) and Priscilla Cook (000-1874), who were in Detroit for the US 1850 Census. the Will Marion Cook memoir (cit. Carter thesis, p. 386) says his grandfather moved to Detroit and was a shoemaker there before the abolition of slavery.

John's immediate family includes sisters Virginia (Jennie) and Sarah (Sadie).

On Sadie's husband Oliver Jackson in Colorado, see:

<http://www.weldgenerations.org/genealogy/getperson.php?personID=I1&tree=Deerfield>

John Hartwell Cook went to Oberlin, whose records say he is from Troy, MI, which is a northern suburb of Detroit; Oberlin 1859-1860 in Prep, then 1860-1864 College with BA 1864 and then MA in 1867.

He taught in Louisville, KY from 1864 to 1866, between earning his BA and MM degrees;

he married Belle in 1865 and took her to Louisville;

their first child was born in Oberlin in April 1867;

they moved to DC in Fall 1867; they were both brought to DC from Louisville by General Otis Howard;

their surviving children were born in 1867 in Oberlin, and 1869 & 1874 in DC.

in DC, he worked under Otis Howard, who was commissioner of the Freedman's Bureau, as Chief Clerk while studying law;

he graduated from the Howard University Law School under John Mercer Langston in 1871, in the school's first graduating class;

he worked as a lawyer in DC;

he served on the Board of Trustees of Howard from 1873,

he was Professor and Dean of the Howard Law School, 1876-1878, from which position he resigned on account of poor health.

He died of TB on March 9, 1879 at age 40, when his second son, Will Marion Cook, had just turned 10.

J. H. Cook was "an intimate and trusted friend" of General Oliver Otis Howard (November 8, 1830 - October 26, 1909), and he and Belle named their third son Oliver, born in 1874, for him. Howard was commissioner of the Freedmens' Bureau from 1865 to 1874 in DC, helped found Howard University in 1867, and served as president of Howard University from 1869 to 1874; this is the period when Belle would have had most contact with him. She had been a member of General Howard's Sunday School class during the Freedmens' Bureau years (the general was an ardent evangelical Christian). He was active in the chartering of Howard University, which was named for him, in March 1867; classes were first held spring 1867, with classes for degrees in law and medicine beginning the following year. Belle was a principal speaker at the Howard University memorial service for Oliver Otis Howard after his death in October 1909.

## MOTHER

Will Marion Cook's mother is Isabel (Belle) Marion Lewis (ca. 1843 - February 18, 1923) of Chattanooga, Tenn. (birthplace acc. her death certificate and US Census records).

Belle is the center of the family, the "Mam" of the song "Mammy." She helped raise the children, Marion and Mercer, of Will and Abbie, especially in the 1910s when they attended high school in Washington, D.C. When Will Marion Cook falls seriously ill in April 1915 he goes home to his mother's house to recover.

Belle's parents are William ("Bill") T. Lewis (1810/1815/1820-September 4, 1896) and Jane Lewis (1824/1828-August 24, 1903); Will Marion Cook memoir (Carter thesis, p. 388) says his grandfather on his mother's side was born free and a harness maker and musical; he bought his wife's freedom; in Chattanooga for the birth of their daughter, and during the Civil War (Will Marion Cook memoir in Carter thesis, p. 388); Will is named for this grandfather, and he was sent to Chattanooga to stay with Belle's parents for a short while in 1880-1881 (and he is with them in US 1880 Census).

Belle's brother Hugh died in the Civil War (Will Marion Cook memoir in Carter thesis, p. 388).

NB: a stray reference from 1926: Will Marion Cook nephew Charlie Lewis is in NYC for the winter; a talented pianist, he hopes to study at the Juilliard Foundation (Pittsburgh Courier, October 2, 1926, p. 6)

Belle is called the sister of Mrs. Jennie Jackson of NYC and "Miss Lucinda ("Mickie") Cook, a member of the faculty of the State N. and I. department of Wilberforce, O. University" (Cleveland Gazette, March 3, 1923, p. 2). In both cases, sister-in-law is meant. She, however, does have a much younger sister Jennie Lewis.

Lucinda was born in 1861 in Michigan according to the US 1900 Census. In the 1880 US Census, Lucinda Cook is 18, living with Belle (37), John (13), William (11), Oliver (6), and Belle's brother and sister Hickman Lewis (16) and Jennie Lewis (23). In the census, Lucinda is identified as Belle's sister-in-law, hence the Cook surname; she is the sister of Will Marion Cook's father, John Hartwell Cook, and thus Will M. Cook's aunt. Lucinda Cook is a DC school teacher for many years. Then, she turns up in on-line records of the state of Ohio in personnel rosters for Wilberforce University from 1915 onward as an instructor and director of "Elementary Training" after an extensive prior

career in education. She is in the 1930 Census in Xenia Ohio, age 64 and a college teacher who owns her own home; Lucinda Jackson, her niece, lives with her.

Belle came to Oberlin from Chattanooga, acc. College records; in Oberlin's Minority Student records, she is Isabel Lewis or Marion Isabel Lewis; she was there in the Young Ladies' Preparatory in 1855-1856, at around age 12, and 1860-1861, at around age 17, then college 1861-1865, earning the litt. degree in 1865; sounds like she had family in the Cleveland/Oberlin area with whom she stayed, especially since her obit mentions Cleveland family; after college, she marries John Hartwell Cook, who surely met her at Oberlin; he was teaching in Louisville in 1864 to 1866; he relocates then to Oberlin to marry and for 1866-1867; their first child was born in Oberlin in April 1867; they are in DC by later that year; she has more children and does Sunday School with Oliver Otis Howard; 1870 and 1880 Census have Will Marion Cook mother as Belle M. Cook.

Not certain when Belle Cook/Howard left off raising children and began to work outside the home; she could have been primarily raising her youngest, Oliver, until 1890 or later.

Her husband dies in 1879.

She is Belle M. Howard after her marriage to James H. Howard. They marry on September 1, 1886 (Carter thesis, p. 356).

In 1894, the new executor of her late husband's estate brings suit against Belle and her current husband for neglecting the management of the estate and the claims against it by creditors.

Possibly a separation for a while from husband James in the mid 1890s?

In the Clorindy story, she feeds Will at his brother John's, as well as bewailing Will's turn to ragtime.

She is a teacher and dressmaker and sewing teacher at Howard, and living with husband James, in the 1900 US Census.

Belle was very active in the DC church and community; she taught sewing in Howard's Industrial Department until 1915 (Carter thesis, p. 3); she was an officer of the auxiliary to the W. C. T. U. in 1887 (Washington Evening Star, November 18, 1887, p. 6); she lectured on women "In Lowly Life" in a panel on "Colored Women's Work" for the Bethel Society at the Metropolitan A. M. E. Church in November 1898 (Washington Evening Star, November 23, 1898, p.

14); and she lectured on "Domestic Service: Its Opportunities," for Washington's Historic Society, the Bethel Literary and Historical Association, on March 13, 1900 (weekly refs. bracketing the date, incl. Washington Colored American, February 17, 1900, p. 7; Washington Colored American, March 3, 1900, p. 7; Washington Colored American, March 17, 1900, p. 7, etc.); In the 1905 Oberlin Quinquennial Catalogue of Officers and Graduates, she is "Marion Isabel Lewis-Howard (Mrs. James H.)," her address is given as 2224 6th St. and her profession as teacher; in 1908 she is a teacher in DC.

Belle Howard participated in the celebration of the life of General Oliver O. Howard at the Metropolitan A. M. E. Church on December 14, 1909 (Washington Bee, December 11, 1909, p. 1; Washington Bee, December 25, 1909, p. 5). Belle is a principal speaker at the Howard University memorial service for Oliver Otis Cook after his death in October 1909.

Belle and James Howard lived at 1724 8th Street NW adjacent to Howard University from about 1908 to her death on February 18, 1923.

Belle Howard lived to be about 80. Her Cleveland Gazette obit says she had been ill for a long time (Cleveland Gazette, March 3, 1923, p. 2).



## STEP-FATHER

Will Marion Cook's stepfather is Dr. James H. Howard (March 23, 1861/1862 - 1/1936), a physician and War Department clerk, born in Brookville, Maryland. He is the son of John Howard (July 1830 - c. 1905) and Rebecca Howard (June 1829 - after 1905), both born in Maryland. They are in Brookville, MD in the US 1880 Census, where John is a farmer, with daughter Martha age 17 and son John age 15 (these reported ages are too young). The family evidently moves to Washington, DC in the early 1880s. Somehow there is money for James to be at Howard University, but dad seems to work at pretty low-level jobs. If they had their own Maryland farm, perhaps there was money from its sale.

James H. Howard, born in 1861, was significantly younger than Belle, and only six to eight years older than his older two stepsons. Census reports and city directories and passport application alternate between calling him a war department clerk and a physician, or both. He's a clerk at Howard University in the 1881 and 1882 Washington DC directories. James H. Howard, A.B. of Brookville, MD, earned his Howard University medical degree at the 1883 Howard Medical School commencement (Washington (DC) Bee, March 10, 1883, p. 3). He's a physician in US 1900 Census, when he and Belle were living with his parents, and with his older sister and her three children.

There are several different individuals named James H. Howard who turn up in the DC press, and in city directories. The Bee is particularly hard on a Rev. James H. Howard in the 1890s.

John Howard and James Howard are both on Pomeroy in the 1885 city directory, with no further detail of address. In the 1886 directory James is living at the corner of 4th and Pomeroy and identified as a clerk, but also working as a physician at 506 Pomeroy with hours 7-8:30 am and 5-7 pm.

Belle and James marry in 1886. When and where did mom and stepdad meet, marry, and set up household? It seems implausible that they would have married before Howard was in his mid-twenties or later, i.e., in DC ca. 1885/1890. Carter bio., p. 17, confirms this general picture by saying his mother had remarried by the time Will Marion Cook returned from Oberlin to DC in spring/summer 1887; Carter thesis is more specific (p. 356), saying they were married September 1, 1886, citing an Oberlin archival file reference. The US 1900 Census says 1887 is the marriage year; Howard would be 25.

In the 1887 directory James is in the physician listing at 506 P; in the 1888 directory he is at 1724 8th St. NW and his office hours are 7-8:30 am and 4-6

pm. In the 1892 directory he is still at 1724 8th St., as a clerk, and father John is at 350 Pomeroy and is a janitor. In the 1893 and 1898 directories James is at 350 Pomeroy as a war department clerk (and dad, also living there, is a janitor). Evidently James and Belle owned and rented out the house at 1724 8th St. NW in the later 1890s and early 1900s. James's Mom and Dad are in the US 1900 Census at 350 Pomeroy as pretty old (69 and 70) and they do not turn up in the 1910 Census. Rebecca, widow of John, was living at 450 Pomeroy in the 1905 DC directory, while James H. Howard was at 350 Pomeroy [Isabel Howard was at 1707 M NW and Isabella Howard was at 1940 3rd NW]. Possibly the move of James and Belle back to 1724 8th St. NW was precipitated by the death of his parents.

Dr. Howard is at 1724 8th Street by 1888, so after they married, and perhaps the home to which they moved upon marriage. They are also at 4th and Pomeroy in some city directories, at his parent's place (and, e.g., Washington (DC) Evening Star, December 29, 1893, p. 8) over the next decade or more, and then the 1724 8th St. house is in the picture until Belle's death in 1923.

After his wife's death, Howard intended to make a medical missionary trip to Somaliland and the Sudan, according to his passport application. He reports his residence at 1724 8th St. NW. The passport was issued August 22, 1923 and he intended to leave the US on September 22, for a trip of two years.

In March, 1924, the Evening Star reports that at Dunbar High School, "Dr. James H. Howard, who has recently returned from an extended visit to Abyssinia, addressed pupils of the fourth hour English class of Dr. E. B. Dykes and the major drawing class of Miss Rosa Nixon on Wednesday. Dr. Howard told of many interesting experiences en route to Abyssinia and then of the government, education, customs, food and clothing of the natives, etc. At the conclusion of his talk Dr. Howard exhibited some Abyssinian trophies, including articles of dress, baskets, weapons, a musical instrument and grain" (Washington Evening Star, March 2, 1924, p. 24).

Dr. Howard is not in the 1924 DC city directory but he remarries and is back in 1926 at a new home address.

Dr. James H. Howard was described at the time of his death in 1936 as "an ardent Seventh Day Adventist, fairly well remembered in Cleveland by the older residents."

## COOK'S OLDER BROTHER

Will Marion Cook's older brother John Hartwell Cook, jr. (4/1867 - 08/19/1937), named for his father---born in Oberlin, OH and older than Will by less than two years---was also early in his adult life a composer, lyricist, and music publisher. Will and John were close, not only while both lived with their cousins and studied in Oberlin, Ohio as teenagers, but especially in the 1890s and early 1900s in DC. John took an important role in the organization of the 1893 events of Colored People's Day at the Chicago World's Fair, for example, as Secretary for that enterprise, and one of the addressees (the other two being Charles S. Morris and Will M. Cook) of a letter from the Bureau of Music confirming the use of Festival Hall on Friday, August 25; he also writes the Freeman to deny certain rumors about the day set aside for colored people (Indianapolis Freeman, August 12, 1893, p. 2). Paul Dunbar and Will Marion Cook wrote much of Clorindy in John's basement in DC in late 1897 and early 1898. John collaborated with Will Marion Cook at least through In Dahomey (1902) and The Southerners (1904), and on to "Jewel of the Big Blue Nile" and "Oo Oo!! Oo!!"(1908), publishing his brother's songs through a company bearing his name (John H. Cook Publishing Co., NY), and also writing and publishing his own compositions. Later, in a strong affirmation of the closeness of the family, Will and John, and their cousin Cora, were named as "Sponsors or Witnesses" for the baptism of Will's grandchild Louis Winston Douglas in 1922.

John was born in Oberlin, did his prep/high school there in 1884-1887, graduated from Howard in 1890, and earned his Pharmacy degree from Howard in 1895. John married Lulie in 1896.

Son Lenoir's North Carolina death entry says his mother was Louise Peters (Louise P.) Cook. She is "Lulie" in a couple of Census entries., and she is Lulie Peters in their Washington DC Marriage record. They were married on December 1, 1896. She is likely the Lulie Peters born about 1873 in DC who is in the 1880 US Census with her parents there.

The children of John jr. and Lulie are daughter Louise H. (February 14, 1901 - 1998), who attended Radcliffe College, and son Lenoir Hall Cook (1907-1977), who attended Dartmouth. Both were born in Ohio. Sojourns by Will Marion Cook in Baltimore in the 1910s and 1920s clearly were to visit not only his mother Belle but also this brother and family. Given that Belle did a lot of the raising of Mercer and Marion, Will's brother's family must have been very important in their lives.

Will's son Mercer Cook graduated from high school (Dunbar High, 1920) in DC, and attended Amherst basically at same time as his cousin Louise attended Radcliffe and his cousin Lenoir attended Dartmouth.

John made a career in DC at the pension office (Will Marion Cook Clorindy memoir and Howard Medical Department book of 1900; 1920 Census calls him a government clerk) and as a government clerk in the US War department (like his stepfather); he is said to be "of the war department" in the reference to his step-father's death in the Cleveland Gazette in 1936, and his wife teaches school in DC and Baltimore. Evidently, he keeps in touch with Cleveland; in 1922, the Cleveland Gazette prints statements of expenses for candidates for nomination to run for governor of Ohio. John, and Louise and Lenoir jointly, give money to the campaign of Henry Clay Smith of Cleveland for the Republican nomination. In an obituary (Cleveland Gazette, August 28, 1937, p. 4), it is mentioned that he lived in Cleveland in his youth, and he "for many years had been the best searcher in the U. S. War department at Washington."

After many years at 2224 6th street, John and Louise moved to 2260 6th Street, sometime before the US 1930 Census. He died Thursday, August 19, 1937 at his home at 2260 6th street (Washington Evening Star, Thursday, August 19, 1937, p. 12; Washington Evening Star, Thursday, August 20, 1937, p. 10).

## NIECE LOUISE

Louise (1901-1998) was the daughter and first child of Cook's older brother John. She was given her mother's name. The Radcliffe girl, she was in the house in Harlem in the summer of 1925 and calls her profession "actress." Perhaps she was the (precocious) Miss Louise Cook who was with "George Stamper's Broadway Strollers" in New York City in 1915 (Indianapolis Freeman, October 30, 1915, p. 4)? She attended Dunbar High and won a cash prize for best grades (Washington Evening Star, October 4, 1917, p. 11), then attended Radcliffe. She was a member of Delta Sigma Theta sorority and a charter member of the Baltimore graduate chapter Epsilon Sigma in 1922 (Baltimore Afro American, March 28, 1992, p. B2; Baltimore Afro American, July 4, 1992, p. 36).

As mentioned, Louise was in NYC with the family in the summer of 1925 and as a dancer, she just possibly was to have been a part of Hotsy-Totsy. She and

cousin Hartwell were principal features at a new colored Philadelphia night club, the Plantation, in 1926 (Variety, March 24, 1926, p. 46).

Before 1930 she married Joseph Newton Hill (Joe Hill) (?1900-?1970), began teaching French at Dunbar High in DC, and raised a family (Baltimore Afro American, June 22, 1929, p. 2; ancestry.com family tree). In an obituary of her father (Cleveland Gazette, August 28, 1937, p. 4), she is said to be a school teacher in Washington and Baltimore. Her husband Hill was a public-school teacher in DC in 1930, and a professor of English at Lincoln University in Chester, Pa. in 1940, and that is where they lived in 1940.

## **NEPHEW LENOIR**

Lenoir (occasionally Lenore or Lenoire) H. Cook (1907-1977) is the son and second child of Cook's older brother John. He memorably sings his uncle's "Mammy" in 1921. Will Marion Cook features Lenoir's singing in the spring 1923 Clef Club tour. Lenoir, musical and possessing linguistic gifts, was on the debate team at Dunbar High (Washington Sunday Star, May 28, 1922, Part I, p. 26), and he was the American Tennis Association's top-rated junior singles tennis player in 1925 (NY Age, May 7, 1926, p. 6); he was "the king of the junior players" (NY Age, September 5, 1925, p. 1). Lenoir Cook was a Dartmouth graduate, a member of the Glee Club and the Omega Psi Phi fraternity there, and a crack tennis player (27th ranked in men's singles in 1927; see Pittsburgh Courier, March 3, 1928, 2nd section, p. 5), whose appendectomy just at the brink of graduation was news in the black press (Baltimore Afro American, June 22, 1929, p. 2). Around the time of graduation, he collaborated with his uncle and his cousin on a couple of songs:

"Harlem Band," words and melody only; words, Mercer Cook, music Lenoir Cook and Will Marion Cook, unpubl.; LoC copyright October 1/5, 1929

"In between: Entre nous," words Mercer Cook; music, Mercer Cook, Lenoir Cook, and Alston Burleigh (NY: Broadway Music corporation, 1929; LoC copyright October 18, 1929)

"Sweetheart I Love You," words and music Lenoir Cook and Mercer Cook (NY: Shapiro, Bernstein & Co., 1929); LoC copyright November 19/20, 1929

Lenoir H. Cook became a professor of languages and head of the Department of Languages---and women's basketball coach in the 1930s and 1940s, at least---at Shaw University in Raleigh, NC. He also continued to sing, too---for example, performing two songs as best man at a friend's wedding (Pittsburgh Courier, June 26, 1937, p. 9). Cook had a long career at Shaw; he became director of special services at Shaw and was chairman of the Centennial-Inaugural Commission at the time of its Centennial Celebration and the inauguration of Shaw's seventh president in 1966 (Washington, DC Afro-American, April 12, 1966, p. 12).

## YOUNGER BROTHER

Will Marion Cook's younger brother is Prof. H. O. (Hugh O./Hugh Oliver/Prof. Ollie) Cook (c.1874-1949), a teacher and community leader, who was educated in the public schools of DC, graduated from Cornell in 1899, settled in Kansas City in 1901, and started a family there. He taught mathematics at Lincoln High (Kansas City, MO), becoming department head, then vice principal in 1916, and principal in 1921. (He was a colleague and superior there of N. Clark Smith.) He held the latter position until his retirement and move to Los Angeles in 1944. In 1915 in KC he was chairman of the YMCA and a member of the Board of Public Welfare, the Child Protective League, and the NAACP. Cook became an acclaimed WWI hero: he took a leave of absence from his position in KC to go overseas to do YMCA work in 1918, and was the YMCA secretary for the 371st Infantry, in which capacity he worked directly with the men in the trenches (taking them cocoa, etc., etc.). He received a Silver Star Citation for administering to the wounded until he was gassed. While overseas, "Prof. H. O. Cook of Kansas City, Mo., who is temporarily engaged in Y. M. C. A. work, presided" over a banquet held by the non-commissioned officers of the 371st, including Bandmaster Elbert Williams, to honor R. R. Moton at Bruyeres, France in early 1919. (Will Marion Cook would later also honor Moton in France in the early 1920s.) Back in Kansas City after the war, he was a mainstay of the African American community for a quarter century (see Charles E. Coulter, "Take Up the Black Man's Burden": Kansas City's African American Communities 1865-1939 [Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006], pp. 93-94). His children are J. H. (Hartwell/J. Hartwell/John Hartwell/ "Harty") Cook (1902-1939), named for his uncle and grandfather, and Hugh O. Cook, jr. (c. 1906-1990).

## NEPHEW HARTWELL

John Hartwell Cook (1902-1939), the son of Oliver Cook and nephew of Will Marion Cook, and a close contemporary of Cook's children, Mercer and Marion, was named for his older uncle and grandfather. His cousins are Louise and Lenoir, and Mercer and Marion. He was a talented dancer, choreographer, comedian, and composer. He worked sometimes in collaboration with Will Marion Cook and other members of his family, including writing one or more songs with Mercer. He went to high school in DC at Dunbar High; perhaps living with his uncle's family (or with grandmother Belle and cousins Mercer and Marion?), he graduated in 1920, the same year as his cousin Mercer. He

then entered Washburn University in Topeka, KS, in the fall of 1920, but did not graduate. Soon he moved from Kansas City to DC/NYC. In March 1923, he was dancing on the program presented by his uncle, Will Marion Cook, at the Lafayette after Cook's return from Europe (NY Age, March 31, 1923, p. 6). Mercer Cook, in 1940, recalls that Harwell was a member of the Spring 1923 Clef Club tour as a vocalist. In 1923-1924 he was helping to stage dances for shows at the Lincoln theatre in DC and the Lafayette in NYC (Chicago Defender hits). In May 1924, he was producing the "Hurry Along Review" in Philadelphia. He was in a tabloid, called *his* tabloid, at the Lafayette in June 1924 (Billboard, June 28, 1924, p. 46); an ad for a show at the Lafayette in June 1924 calls him "Positively the World's Greatest Dancer" (NY Age, June 14, 1924, p. 6). In the spring of 1925 he was touring in vaudeville in a duo with Willard McConn ("Nifty Steppers"). In July 1925, he was at the Club Alabam with Abbie Mitchell (NY Age, July 18, 1925, p. 6; Variety, September 30, 1925, p. 8), and was a part of the large group at the family apartment that summer. He was planning to be part of the Hotsy-Totsy (La revue nègre) company in 1925 but then did not sail (Variety, September 30, 1925, p. 8; Chicago World art). It is likely that he was replaced in that show, when it arrived in Paris, by Joë Alex, a Parisian-based actor and dancer who was originally from Martinique.

Hartwell and cousin Louise were principals featured at a new colored Philadelphia night club, the Plantation, in 1926 (Variety, March 24, 1926, p. 46). Moving to Europe, he was an active composer and dancer, including in collaborations with his cousin Marion and her husband, Louis Douglas, over 1926-1931. For example, they performed together in Vienna in January and February 1929: "Als erfolgreiche Kabarettnummern etablieren sich die beiden Douglas und Hartwell Cook mit ihren Stepptänzen. Geschmacksache!" (Vienna, Freiheit!, February 12, 1929, p. 4).

Hartwell returned permanently to the US to open a dancing school in Washington, DC; he returns to US by ship in early 1931, and in April 1931, he is scheduled to appear on a big Easter affair---a monster benefit held by the Florence Mills Theatrical Association at the Masonic Temple auditorium in Washington, DC. He appeared at the Lafayette in 1931 and again in 1934. He lived in Washington and NYC after his return to the US and his second marriage in 1932. He worked with his cousin Mercer and his uncle Will, and several of his songs were widely known.

"Stop the Sun, Stop the Moon: my gal's gone: fox trot" (also "my man's gone"), words and music J. Russel Robinson, Mercer Cook and



Hartwell "Harty" Cook (NY: De Sylva, Brown, and Henderson, 1932); introduced by Connie Boswell.

"Rhythm Train," words Harty Cook and E. Wilson; melody, Harty Cook and B. Carter (copyright 1932)

"For cryin' out loud," words Mercer Cook; melody, Hartwell Cook (copyright 1932)

"Sweet Sweetheart," words, Mercer Cook; melody, Hartwell Cook (copyright 1933)

"Sweetest Little Feller," words, Mercer Cook; melody, Hartwell Cook (copyright 1933)

Hartwell Cook died at age 37 in 1939 and was buried in Kansas City; obits include Los Angeles California Eagle, August 17, 1939, p. 2A; Kansas City Plaindealer, August 18, 1939, p. 2; Baltimore Afro American, August 19, 1939, p. 17; Chicago Defender, August 19, 1939, p. 21.

## **WIFE ABBIE**

**ABBIE MITCHELL (1883-1960)**

Will Marion Cook's wife, Abbie Mitchell, was the greatest African American actress and singer of her generation. She excelled on stage in musical comedy, opera, and spoken theater, and was an active recitalist singing classical and popular arias and songs. She was also a director and producer of theatrical productions, manager of the Abbie Mitchell Players, and a noted vocal coach. She deserves a book-length biography.

Abbie Mitchell left autobiographical notes that were presented to the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University as part of the documents of her son Mercer Cook on deposit there. Abbie's materials were drawn on in the Marva Carter biography of her first husband, Will Marion Cook, and other accounts. Note, though, that they have not been directly consulted in the creation of this document. Brief biographical data for Abbie and a summary description of additional materials at Howard (programs, flyers, playbills, etc.) are provided in the on-line finding aid for the Will Mercer Cook collection at Howard. See [http://dh.howard.edu/finaid\\_manu](http://dh.howard.edu/finaid_manu)

The major sections that follow are:

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**BRIEF OVERVIEW OF EARLY YEARS**

The story, as related by Abbie in her unpublished memoirs (Moorland-Spingarn), reinforced by some newspaper accounts, including in the Indianapolis Freeman 1916, and as retold by Marva Carter in her biography of Will Marion Cook, is that:

Abbie was born on East Third Street in NYC (born in NYC: also acc. Indianapolis Freeman (1916))  
 parents were African-American mom and German-Jewish father  
 [Her father's name is Emanuel Mitchell of Baltimore, according to one of her passport applications]  
 mother dies during childbirth

raised by Alice Payne, a maternal aunt, her mother's oldest sister, in Baltimore; = reared in Baltimore (acc. Indianapolis Freeman (1916))  
 and went to a convent school: St. Elizabeth's Convent  
 also, raised in Baltimore by father, grandmother (mom's mother or dad's mother?), and Aunt Josephine (like who Alice, also must be mom's sister).

Attended South Street M. E. Church there (acc. Indianapolis Freeman (1916))

father and grandmother die close in time, and at that moment she returns to NYC (1896 or 1898, presumably), to live with her aunt on W. 33rd Street; by this account, she is in NYC with Aunt Josephine;  
 NB: she moves back to NYC at age 12 with aunt Josephine to study music, acc. Harlem Renaissance Lives from the African American National Biography, ed. Gates and Higginbotham, p. 356

appeared in Clorindy at age 14 (acc. Indianapolis Freeman (1916))

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In December 1919, Josephine Middleton writes a notarized "affidavit for a relative" for Abbie's passport application. Josephine gives her home address as 146 W. 124<sup>th</sup> St. and says she is Abby's aunt. Her affidavit states that she "was with my sister, Mrs. Mitchell when Abby was born. the mother died 4 years later and I brought Abby up."

This clearly contradicts the story of the death of Abbie's mother during

childbirth, but reinforces that Abbie was raised for a number of years by Josephine.

In Abbie's 1922 "Affidavit to Explain Protracted Foreign Residence" for her 1922 passport application, she gives, as a family tie, "Mother, Alice V. Payne, 146 West 124th Street, New York"

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In Pittsburgh Courier, February 27, 1954, "Courier Magazine Section," p. 3, there is an article on Abbie in which she offers lots of conflicting or hard to reconcile details:

She has been in the theater 53 years, starting as a leading lady at age 12 [so she would be 55 years old now, hence born in 1899; on stage from age 12 also turns up elsewhere]

She says she married at 14, and Will Marion Cook was 22 years older [makes him 36 at the time, so married in 1905; if the number 22 is a typo for the number 12, then he would have been 26, and the year would have been 1895; neither solution is good]

and their marriage broke up after 15 years which would make her 29, and the year around 1913 (but she was divorced much earlier and remarried in 1910).

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Baltimore Afro-American, February 25, 1984, p. 6 and Baltimore Afro-American, August 8, 1992, p. B5, says she was reared in St. Elizabeth's Convent in Baltimore and attended the Baltimore public schools, and married Cook at age 14.

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In some accounts, she acts in Clorindy at age 14 and marries at age 16; by one account (Baltimore Afro-American, February 25, 1984, p. 11) she was 12 for Clorindy and married at 14; could be she entered stage work at 12 and was in Clorindy at 14, the same year as she married.

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"Miss Abbie Mitchell, America's Greatest Colored Singer, Now Appearing in Drama" (Indianapolis Freeman, December 23, 1916, p. 9): a major profile, with large photograph; a brief review of her career states that "She was born in New York City but reared in Baltimore, Md., where as a child she attended the South Street M. E. church and participated in its entertainments. When fourteen years old she was given the opportunity to appear professionally in "Chlorindy," [sic] the Cook musical melange, at the Great Northern Theater, Chicago."

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## ABBIE'S FAMILY

In the US 1870 Census, Alice B. Holliday (black), age 16, and Josephine Holliday (black), age 9, living together in Baltimore, along with Upshur Holliday (female), age 6. They are the children of William Holliday, age 53 and Harriet Holliday, age 45. (William and Harriet were 45 and 37 in the US 1860 Census; they were born around 1815 and 1823/25/30 in Maryland.) Alverda Davis (23) and Jacob Davis (25) are living there, too; Alverda might be an older Holliday sister, now married. By these dates, Alice is born ca. 1854 and Josephine is born ca. 1861. In the US 1880 Census, daughters Josephine (20) and Upshur (16) are living in Baltimore with William (60) and Harriett (50).

Could Upshur be Luella? This seems likely. Born around 1864, she would have had Abbie at around age 19.

## THE AUNTS

Abbie's aunts are the Holliday sisters *Mrs.* Alice V. Payne and *Mrs.* Josephine Jefferson (and Josephine Jefferson = Josephine Middleton).

Alice is not infrequently identified as Abbie's mother, and Abbie as her daughter, in travel and census documents.

It is hard to confirm just how old Alice Payne is, but it seems more likely that an OLDER date of birth is the correct one; folks generally make themselves younger, not older. By that argument, she was born in 1854, and should be 55 in 1910, 60 in 1915, 70 in 1925.

In the US 1900 Census, there is a black Alice Payne married to Charles Payne for four years, since 1896, living in Philadelphia, born in Maryland in September 1854, now age 45 (shortly to turn 46). One living child, but clearly not of this marriage. Not impossible at all that this is Abbie's aunt. Perhaps Abbie moved with her aunt Josephine to New York around the time of Alice's marriage.

Alice V. Payne is a black female widow in US 1920 Census in Harlem, age 65, born in Maryland ca. 1854/1855, at 146 W. 124th St. This basically aligns with the facts of two passenger lists in 1906. When she departs Hamburg with Mercer on May 4, 1906 on the Blücher, and arrives back in NYC on the Cuxhaven with Mercer on May 15, 1906, she is 50 and Mercer is 3. Abbie is 22 in both documents, and her name appears nearby but not with her son and her aunt. So, by these documents, Abbie is born in 1883. (In May 1906 she was 22, turning 23 in September).

The 1910 US Census from NYC calls Alice head of the household, age 43 (but should be 53 or 55); Abbie is called her daughter, age 26, and Marion and Mercer are grandchildren. If Abbie is 26, and not yet had her birthday in 1910, then she was born in 1883.

The 1915 NYS census says Alice Payne is head, age 50 (but ought to be 60), Josephine Jefferson is her sister, age 49, Abbie Mitchell is called her daughter, age 30, and Mercer Cook, age 12, is her grandson. They live at 135 West 135th Street. This seems to be the only solid hit on Josephine as a member of the household.

The 1920 US Census and 1925 NYC Census identify a household with John A. Middleton (of South Carolina) as head, Josephine Middleton (of Maryland) as wife (they are 44 and 45) and (in 1920) Abbie Mitchel [sic], who is their niece (she is 35); this is Abbie living with Aunt Josephine, now married or remarried (she had been called Mrs. Josephine Jefferson), in the same building as Alice V. Payne: 146 W. 124th. Alice is on the very next page of the 1920 Census sheets. Again, note that at this moment she is apparently in the same building but not the same apartment.

Passport appl. of 4 April 1922 puts Abbie at 145 W. 124th St., while passport appl. of 9 March puts her at 146 W. 124th.

The 1925 NY Census has the Middletons still at 146 W. 124th St. With them [check], Alice is 70, hence born ca. Sept. 1854. No sign of Abbie, but the kids are all there: Marion and Louis and daughter Marion, plus brother Mercer, and cousins Hartwell and Louise.

In 1925, Will Marion Cook is at the Spillers, at 232 W. 138th; there is no sign of Abbie in a NYC directory.

No sign of Alice after this so she probably died between 1925 and 1930.  
Perhaps the gathering of the clans in 1925, with Mercer's graduation and wedding, was also a chance to see Alice for the last time??

One Josephine Jefferson is in 1940 US Census as widowed and a resident of a hospital on West 98th St. in NYC, BUT "inferred residence in 1935" is Ashville, NC. Any relevance for Will Marion Cook? Could this be Josephine Jefferson, then Josephine Middleton, reverting to her maiden name, or first married surname?

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#### ABBIE'S NAME:

Abigail Mitchell (mostly "Abbie," and much less often Abby or Abbey; Abigail is very rare); her daughter Marion has middle name Abigail; there is no evidence that Abbie's first name is "Abriea", though this turns up in new web hits; "Abriea" is a fabrication based on a reading of a sloppy travel document, the Cuxhaven passenger manifest of 1906, where the name is Abie.

Her last name is almost always spelled Mitchell with doubled "l," but sometimes is Mitchel [sic] instead, so electronic searches need to include the latter variant.

In cast lists for Sons of Ham:  
there is reference to Abbey Mitchell Cook in Mount Vernon News,  
September 13, 1900, p. 8;

reference to Abbie Cook in Indianapolis Freeman, October 6, 1900, p. 5 and Philadelphia Inquirer, September 30, 1900, p. 18; and reference to "Abbie Mitchell Cook" in NY Clipper, October 20, 1900, p. 748.

These appear to be the first use of her married name.

She is Abbie Mitchell in the Uncle Eph cast list and in newspaper references in Boston in December 1900 to that show.

NB: until her divorce from Will Marion Cook she goes variously by Abbie Mitchell, Abbie Cook, and Abbie Mitchell Cook. After the, she drops Cook and Mitchell is the norm. Still, in the Washington DC certificate of death for Will Marion Cook, she is identified as Mrs. Abbie M. Cook.

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#### ABBIE'S 1883 BIRTHDATE:

- 1883: Will Marion Cook Defender obit (Chicago Defender, July 29, 1944, p. 2) and other sources say she was in Clorindy in summer 1898 at age 14; if her birthday is September 25 and she was still 14, and not yet 15, when she was in the show chorus that summer, then she was born in 1883
- 1905: Tennessee Student trip; Application for passport, made from Paris on November 29, 1905, clearly states that she was born 25 September 1883 in NYC and her age is 22; father is a US native; she left the US on October 21, 1905.
- 1906: Tennessee Student trip; departure from Hamburg on the Blücher on May 4, 1906, for Dover, Boulogne, and NYC, has Alice and Mercer together, plus Abbie, age 22; arrival in NYC on Cuxhaven on May 15, 1906 again says she is 22; with September birthday, she would turn 23 later that year; that means born in 1883. Alice is 50
- 1908, in September: She elaborately and publicly celebrates her twenty-fifth birthday in 1908 (NY Age, October 1, 1908, p. [6]); this makes her born in 1883. This is the most solid confirmation of other data on the question of birthdate.



1910: one US 1910 Census has her at a San Francisco boarding house and gives age 24 and thus birthdate ca. 1886; that could be 24 about to turn 25, pushing the birth year back to 1885.

1910: another US Census entry for 1910 has her in NYC, living with her mother and her two children, and she's 26, with kids 9 and 7. If she's 26 at the time of the 1910 Census, then she was born in 1883.

On the face of it, during the early 1900s she stuck with 1883. If that is not the correct year, then she wanted to be older. She slices a year off of her age as she nears forty. Indeed, some of the fog around her age at the time of marriage might have to do with an increasing compression between birth date and Clorindy and her first marriage as she slices a year or more off of her age.

Carter thesis, p. 361, says that "according to Oberlin College records" they married on October 21, 1900, when he was 31 and she was 16. He was definitely 31 then; she would have been 16 if she was born in 1884.

The 1922 PASSPORT application

Application is from England on March 9, 1922/April 4, 1922; it says Abbie's father, Emanuel Mitchell, was born in Baltimore and is now deceased; she was born in NYC on September 25, 1884; she had a passport issued January 13, 1920 and she left the US on March 6, 1920 for England; she was previously abroad in France in October and November 1898 [actually? isn't this 1905?]; is this first time she really champions 1884??

In a 27 April 1953 Social Security document, her birthdate is 25 September 1884 and she gives her name as Abigail L. Mitchell.

Marva Griffin Carter bio. (p. 000) puts Abbie's birthdate in 1886.

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ABBIE'S VOCAL TRAINING

She is said to have studied voice with Will Marion Cook (her husband), and with Harry Burleigh and Emilia Serrano in New York, and with Jan de Reszke and de Reszke's own teacher, Szbrilla [sic; recte: Giovanni Sbriglia], in Paris. She also coached with Melville Charleton, her frequent accompanist. See, inter alia, Tanner, Dusky Maidens, p. 113.

It is worth pointing out that the New York Age never associates Mitchell with De Reszke or Sbriglia.

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#### ABBIE'S WEDDING DATE

The date of Abbie's first marriage, to Will Marion Cook, does not appear to be firmly settled in the secondary literature. If she was born in 1883 and was married at age 14, then that would put the marriage between June and September 1898. If she was born in 1884, then a marriage at 14 falls between September 1898 and September 1899. If Harry Burleigh and his wife were witnesses, then the marriage took place after February 9, 1899. The first use of her married name that has been located to date is in cast lists for Sons of Ham from September 1900. Also, 1899 is the year of marriage offered in the on-line finding list to the papers of her son Will Mercer Hook at Howard University.

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#### CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE

1883: Abbie Mitchell (25 September 1883 - 16 March 1960) was born in NYC, on East Third St. just a couple of blocks from the Bowery. Her mother, Luella (Holiday or Holliday) Mitchell died during childbirth. The name Luella is here taken from the 1992 finding aid to the Will Mercer Cook papers in the Moorland-Spingarn Collection at Howard University (mounted on-line in 2015).

1880s: Moved to Baltimore and raised by her aunts.

1895-96: Moved to NYC with aunt Josephine, and goes on stage by around now, age 12, a real child prodigy

1898: in Clorindy that summer at age 14 (about to turn 15); in her unpublished autoiographical notes, she remembers meeting Cook, Dunbar, and Burleigh on the stage of the roof garden while preparing the show (Snyder, Harry Burleigh (2016), p. 163)

1898: By many accounts, Abbie marries Cook at age 14, thus before September 25, 1898 (perhaps). Abbie often offers the age 14 for her marriage in interviews (e.g., Detroit Tribune, April 27, 1940, p. 4; Abbie says she went on stage at age 12 and married at age 14 (Chicago Defender, May 18, 1940, p. 13, and repeated much later in the Afro American). This makes sense if she moves to NYC with aunt Josephine at age 12 in later 1895 or 1896 and joins Clorindy at age 14, in the summer before her 15th birthday.

Abbie quoted as saying they were married in DC "when I was very young" (Carter bio, p. 91)

Will Marion Cook married Abigail (1883-1960) on October 21 [??], perhaps in the year 1898 [??], or 1899 (Am. Nat. Bio.) or 1900 [??]; Howard finding list biographical data say they married in 1899. In simplest terms, if she is born in 1883 and marries at age 14, then she marries between September 1897 and September 25, 1898. If Harry Burleigh and his new wife witnessed the wedding, then it was in 1899 or later.

Marva Griffin Carter bio. of Cook offers references (pp. 52-53) that they were not married until after the birth of Marion in 1900.

Clearly, whatever the details of the matter, Abbie married and had her kids extremely young, and was 15/17 years younger than her husband). Children Marion Abigail (March 22, 1900 - 1950) and Will Mercer (March 30, 1903 - October 4, 1987).

NB: 1910 Census says she bore 5 children, of which only two are living. IF this is actually true, could some health issues reported in the papers have been unsuccessful pregnancies? Could this account for some gaps in reported activity?

After the 1908 divorce, children at first live with their mother in NYC; see 1910 US Census; kids listed twice in 1910 census, both with mom and her mother in NYC and also boarding in DC with Will Marion Cook mother and stepfather, James and Isabel Howard;

When did she first go on the stage, and where?

1898-1899

1898: in Clorindy in the summer; this is surely her first sustained professional appearance

1898: Acc. Rye, "Roster," Abbie was in France, Oct-Nov. 1898. That must be taken from her 1922 passport application, which says she was in France in Oct-Nov 1898; if so, she did not tour with Clorindy after the summer run, and probably was not yet married. She would have just turned 15. Ultimately this seems to be a highly unlikely blind alley, with no trip to France at this time.

1898: Abbie is probably in the Clorindy touring company this fall. By one account, she took the lead role during its appearance in Chicago (Tanner, Dusky Maidens, p. 108, etc.); Clorindy was mounted in Chicago in vaudeville at the Great Northern Theater in November 1898 (Chicago Defender, November 21, 1898, p. 5) and returned in March 1899 to the Hopkins (Chicago Defender, March 20, 1899, p. 7)

NB: Louise Alston joins the fall Clorindy touring company in September (Washington Colored American, September 24, 1898, p. 7).

NB: Lottie Thompson and Ada Overton, meanwhile, are in the company of Senegambian Carnival (e.g., Cincinnati Post, September 17, 1898, p. 2; Washington Evening Star, October 8, 1898, p. 24, etc.)

1898, in December: in late December 1898, Abbie joined the Black Patti Troubadours in Chicago (if "Miss Affie Mitchell" is her; see Indianapolis Freeman, December 31, 1898, p. 5); possibly she is with them only for a short period of time over the holidays.

1899, in February: Abbie is reported as a member of the travelling Clorindy

company in February 1899 (Denver Post, February 26, 1899, p. 5).

1899: year given for her marriage to Will Marion Cook in the brief biographical overview provided in the finding aid to her son Mercer Cook's papers at Howard University.

1899-1900: Abbie appears in The Policy Players

1900, in March: birth of daughter Marion on March 22, 1900; taking Abbie's real birth year as 1883, she had already turned 17

1900, in June: Abbie appears in Jes' Lak White Folks, a negro operetta by Cook and Dunbar, in the New York Roof Garden (NY Times, June 24, 1900, p. 17)

1900-1901

1900-1901, 1901-1902: Abbie appears for two seasons in Sons of Ham

1900, in October: Married in 1900? The marriage took place in 1900, acc. Carter thesis (p. 361), on October 21, 1900, in the New York Music Building, with Harry Burleigh and his wife as witnesses (Snyder, Harry T. Burleigh [2016], p. 164); this is seven months after the March birth of Marion, with Will Marion Cook age 31 and Abbie age 16; that would have been while the show Sons of Ham was back in NYC for two weeks, and it would have been just after Abbie's birthday, newly turning 17 or 16. No independent evidence has yet been seen for a date and place of wedding in this or any other year. There are references to her that identify her as Abbie Cook and Abbie Mitchell Cook before October 21, 1900, as above.

Given the reports that she marries Will Marion Cook when she is 14, and that she is in Clorindy when she is 14, and given a real birthdate in 1883, then the stronger possibility is that they married in 1898, before her fifteenth birthday on September 25. If the date of October 21 is right, but the year is really 1898, then she would have been 15 officially (or 14 if she begins slicing a year off her age!).

Burleigh and his wife married on February 9, 1899 (Washington Colored American, February 18, 1899, p. 5, and a Washington, D.C. marriage record on ancestry.com), and if the couple witnessed the Cook wedding, and were married at the time, then it would have taken place after that date. Again, the Mercer Cook finding aid at Howard gives the year of marriage as 1899.

1900, in December: Abbie in Uncle Eph's Christmas, and revived Clorindy

1901-1902

1901, in August: Abbie is anticipated to be in the cast of Will Marion Cook's new musical show, The Cannibal King, this fall (Indianapolis Freeman, August 10, 1901, p. 5; Lexington Leader, October 23, 1901, p. 7); this show never gets to the stage, though.

1901-1902: second season of Sons of Ham

1902, in March: song [On] Emancipation Day is new and sung by Abbie at a testimonial in NYC for Sam Lucas (Indianapolis Freeman, April 5, 1902, p. 5)

1902-1903

1902-1903, Abbie appears in In Dahomey in US and then in England, including performing for the King.

1903, in March: birth of son Mercer Cook in Washington, DC.

1903, in May: She is back on stage in In Dahomey in London at the Shaftesbury Theatre in mid May 1903 (NY Dramatic Mirror, June 6, 1903, p. 11, printing report from London dated May 23);

1903, in August: Abbie and her husband return to the US in latest July or earliest August (Indianapolis Freeman, August 8, 1903, p. 5)

## 1903-1904

1903: she is under the patronage of the Vanderbilts; she is "our coming great singer" and her voice compares favorably with that of Adelina Patti (Washington Colored American, September 5, 1903, p. 9; Indianapolis Freeman, October 10, 1903, p. 7)

1904, in May: over the summer, from May through September, Abbie is featured in The Southerners

## 1904-1905

1904, in October: In variety, as Abbie Mitchell and Her Four Southerners; "Mrs. Abbie Mitchell Cook with her picks, will be a feature at Hurtig & Seamon this week. It's afloat that the act will go to England in the near future" (Indianapolis Freeman, October 29, 1904, p. 5). "Abbie Mitchell and her four assistants, of whom I could recognize was Muriel Ringgold, Maggie Taylor and Mattie Brown were special feature at Proctor's Twenty-third street theatre the past week" (Indianapolis Freeman, December 24, 1904, p. 5).

1904, in November: Abbie's name is in a cast list for the 1904-1905 version of In Dahomey (Kansas City Rising Sun, Friday November 11, 1904, p. 1)

1904, in December: Abbie and her Southerners are at Proctor's, 23rd Street, in vaudeville (Sampson, Ghost Walks, p. 332)

1905, over the summer: Abbie is with Hogan and the Memphis Students ensemble for a summer show

1905, in August: during the summer run of Memphis Students at a Broadway roof garden, Abbie and Cook had a big fight in her dressing room on Friday, August 4; a newspaper says Cook then slashed up her stage clothes and slippers in her dressing room while she was at a rehearsal (NY Morning Telegraph, Saturday, August 5, 1905, p. 10; also, according to Abbie memoirs in Moorland-Spingarn collection, acc. Sotiropoulos,

Staging Race, p. 185); despite the violence, they clearly make up enough to go to Europe together (see below).

1905, in August: Ernest Hogan and Abbie Mitchell and the 25 Tennessee Students "will give a new repertoire of songs" (NY Sun, August 6, 1905, section 2, p. 8)

1905-1906

1905, fall: Abbie makes up with Will Marion Cook; she is working with him in fall 1905-1906, etc., so their quite public squabble evidently blew over; she goes to Europe with Tennessee Students, from October to May, making Hogan mad. Famous incident where she misses the steamer to avoid being served with an injunction by Hogan (e.g., Brooklyn Daily Eagle, October 22, 1905, p. 8; NY Sunday Telegraph, October 22, 1905, p. 1; Indianapolis Freeman, September 30, 1905, p. 5)

1905, in November: In variety at the Olympia in Paris (Paris, Le Figaro, November 2, 1905, p. 1; Paris, L'Intransigeant, November 11, 1905, p. 3; etc.; many Paris newspaper hits with spelling "Abie Mitchell")

1905, in December: Abbie and The Tennessee Students, having been at the Olympia in Paris for pretty much the month of November, will start at the Palace (Manchester, The Guardian and the Observer, December 3, 1905, p. 5)

1906, in January and February: Abbie and the Tennessee students are in variety in Berlin, at the Circus Albert Schumann, for at least a month or so (Berliner Börsenzeitung, January 31, 1906, p. 16; Berliner Börsenzeitung, February 13, 1906, p. 12, etc., etc.; many Berlin newspaper hits with spelling "Abie Mitchell")

1906, in April: Abbie is at the Colosseum in Vienna in variety, advertised as "Das Leben am Mississippi, dargestellt von der berühmten schwarzen Soubrette Miss Abbie Mitchell und ihrer Truppe (15 Personen)"; at least 18 references in on-line searchable Vienna papers throughout April, Viennese papers most often spell her name Abie Mitchel;



her residence registration included her son, Will Mercer (personal communication from Konrad Nowakowski)

1906, in May: Abbie and her Tennessee Students return from abroad in May

1906-1907

1906, in fall: Abbie begins the season in Rufus Rastus

1906, in November: leaving Rufus Rastus, on November 9 she will assist Will Marion Cook in a concert in Kansas City (Kansas City Rising Sun, October 25, 1906, p. 5)

1906, end of year: at the Pekin in Chicago with Cook; then at Hammerstein's Victoria theater with the Tennessee Students; Will Marion Cook runs ads in the Indianapolis Freeman (e.g., Indianapolis Freeman, December 22, 1906, p. 5) announcing that he is booking Abbie Mitchell, Tennessee Students, Tribble and Marshall, and Best Colored Acts in Vaudeville

1907, in January: In Boston, "Marion Cooke presents Miss Abbie Mitchell and the ten Tennessee Students at the Orpheum theater this week" (NY Age, January 24, 1907, p. 8).

1907, in January: Abbie then goes abroad in mid January, leaving the Tennessee Students behind to go to Berlin. She is in Berlin at the Wintergarten from February 1 or so (Berliner Volkszeitung, February 1, 1907, p. 4, etc.; a common spelling in the papers is "Abbie Mitchel")

NB: In a Pittsburgh Courier article (1954), Abbie reminisces about when she was singing in Germany, and Mercer, who was five years old, was brought over to be with her, and he met Mme. Schumann-Heink on the boat. It is not clear just when she would have been in Germany in 1908 or 1909, when Mercer was five. The spring 1907 engagements in Europe are likelier (when Mercer was, in fact, four), or even the year before, when passenger lists show he was three and returning with his mother from Hamburg in May (as above in 1906).

1907, in May: Cole and Johnson report from Berlin that Abbie's will be one of the colored acts opening in Moscow and St. Petersburg on May 14 (Sampson, Ghost Walks, p. 406).

By some relatively recent secondary accounts, Abbie performed before Czar Nicholas II of Russia in St. Petersburg 1908 in The Red Moon (or, alternatively, sang before the czar when that show toured England), and it is similarly not clear just when that could possibly have taken place. Indeed, that show did not go abroad.

See, inter alia:

<http://www.encyclopedia.com/women/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/mitchell-abbie-1884-1960>

The 1907 trip to Russia in a variety act seems the likelier opportunity to have played before the czar.

1907, in May: she returns to US from Europe in May

1907-1908

1907, in December: Abbie is said to be recently returned from abroad, and, back in Chicago, she is performing in Panama at the Pekin in December 1907 (Indianapolis Freeman, January 4, 1908, p. 5).

1908, in January: she joined Bandanna Land; a reviewer writes that "Will Marion Cook's tuneful music soars in ambitious pursuit of Tetrizinni's top note. The composer's wife, Abbie Mitchell Cook, who can be delightful when she sticks to the simple and appealing melodies of plantation ballads, conducts herself like Mary Garden as Thais"; the review goes on to speak of "histrionic and vocal ambitions" (Salt Lake Herald, February 9, 1908, p. 12).

1908, in March: Enrico Caruso heard the show "and was so delighted with Abbie Mitchell-Cook's singing that he was given an introduction to the little singer" (NY Age, March 12, 1908, p. 6)

1908, in March: sick from overwork, Abbie has to take a break from the company (NY Age, March 12, 1908, p. 6)

1908, in March: she returns to Bandanna Land, and then is sick again, but it isn't serious (NY Age, March 26, 1908, p. 6)

1908, in April: she is back with the company (NY Age, April 30, 1908, p. 6)

1908, in May: she is going to be concertizing in Philadelphia and Wilmington, Del., and may join the Memphis Students for the summer (NY Age, May 14, 1908, p. 6)

1908, in June: Ada Overton Walker stages a benefit on June 3, and Abbie surprises by singing a classical selection rather than "little 'coon songs,' love songs and ballads" (NY Age, June 11, 1908, n.p. [p. 6])

1908, in June: Abbie is on stage in vaudeville with Tom Fletcher and the Memphis Students (NY Age, June 25, 1908, n.p. [p. 6]; NY Times, July 5, 1908, p. X5)

1908 in August: Abbie and Will Marion Cook divorced in August 1908. She married at least twice more, in 1910 [divorced when?], and 1926, divorced 1931.

Abbie gets a divorce on August 1st, and will get \$40 per week in alimony (NY Herald, August 2, 1908, p. 5); the NY Age, Thursday, August 6, 1908, p. 6 also has an announcement: after eight or ten years of marriage, the Cooks are divorced; "domestic life between the Cooks has not been the most pleasant for several years, and the legal separation was expected." In the "Theatrical Jottings" bits in NY Age, August 6, 1908, p. 6, on the same page as the announcement of the Cooks' divorce, it mentions that Cleo Desmond is to succeed Abbie Mitchell in the Memphis Students.

1908-1909

1908, in fall: With Cole & Johnsons in The Red Moon, season one

1908, in September: Abbie elaborately and publicly celebrates her twenty-fifth birthday in 1908 (NY Age, October 1, 1908, p. [6]); this makes her born in 1883. This is the most solid confirmation of other data on the

question of birthdate.

1909, in June-July: LIME-KILN CLUB

Cook writes a 25-minute vaudeville act, The Lime Kiln Club, starring Abbie Mitchell, Tom Fletcher, Muriel Ringgold, J. Leubrie Hill; Abbie is on board by special permission of Cole and Johnson, with whom she spent last season in The Red Moon.

1909-1910

1909, in September: Abbie begins her second season with The Red Moon.

"Abbie Mitchell continues to play the leading female role of "Minnehaha." She has but one solo---"As Long as the World Rolls On," which she sings in her usual "Mitchellesque" style in the second act. She was compelled to respond to several encores before the audience had enough of her rendition. We note with pleasure that in singing Miss Mitchell has changed her pronunciation of such words as pathway. No longer do we get "p-a-w-t-h-w-a-y." Thanks! Neither is the little artists as melodramatic as last season. She is improving greatly in her work"

(Lester Walton, in the NY Age, September 2, 1909, p. 6)

1909, in September: A SEASON IN VAUDEVILLE

After just a week, Abbie leaves The Red Moon to enter vaudeville with ex-husband Will Marion Cook (NY Age, September 9, 1909, p. 6).

In September, with The Lime Kiln Club established, Cook goes on the road with Abbie Mitchell in vaudeville, from September, acc. Cleveland Gazette, September 25, 1909, p. 1; in mid September she is, for example, in Chicago (Chicago Tribune, September 19, 1909, p. B2)

Cleveland Gazette, October 2, 1909, p. 3 says Abbie is leaving the Red Moon company for vaudeville and says she does it both for the money and also because she loves vaudeville, and further, "My husband, Mr. Will Marion Cook, will make the tour with me, personally conducting the orchestra at every performance that I appear."

Abbie, garnering good reviews, "is making good in vaudeville" (NY Age, September 23, 1909, n.p. [p. 6])

1909, in December: she is in variety in Minneapolis, doing "high class singing" (Billboard, December 25, 1909, p. 11)

1910, in March: She is in vaudeville on the West Coast.

1910, in May: "She was the first black woman to do a single vaudeville turn at New York's Majestic Theater, in May, 1910" (Sampson, *Ghost Walks*, p. 516; Harlem Renaissance Lives from the African American National Biography, ed. Gates and Higginbotham, p. 357).

1910, June: the Monday before June 30, 1910 she appears at Mott's Pekin in Chicago (Indianapolis Freeman, July 2, 1910, p. 5).

1910, in August: two years after her divorce from Cook, the marriage of Abbie to William Charles Phillips of Chicago, a surveying engineer with the C. B. & Q. Railway Co., is announced. Indianapolis Freeman, August 13, 1910, p. 5, says it will be August 21; Denver Franklin's paper the statesman, August 20, 1910, p. 12, says the wedding will be tomorrow, i.e., August 21; Indianapolis Freeman, August 20, 1910, p. 5 says the marriage was last Monday, hence August 15; Denver Franklin's paper the statesman, August 27, 1910, p. 12, says the wedding was last Monday in the parsonage of the Institutional Church, Chicago (evidently following the Freeman here, as also above); NY Age, August 25, 1910, p. 6; Carter bio. also cites NY Age, August 18, 1910, p. 6); Carter thesis says August 15 (p. 370); by August 22 she was in DC with the Pekin Trio in variety at the opening of the Howard Theatre, and at least for the rest of 1910 and into at least May/June/July 1911 she is based in Chicago; she is identified as Abbie Mitchell-Phillips (Chicago Broad Axe, May 13, 1911, p. 2 and Broad Axe, May 20, 1911, p. 2).

1910-1911

1910, in November: Abbie "is still the drawing card throughout the whole city of Chicago" (Denver Franklin's paper the statesman, November 19, 1910, p. 12).

1911, in January: Abbie is in her last week of an engagement in variety at the Grand (Indianapolis Freeman, January 7, 1911, p. 5)

1911, in January: Denver Franklin's paper the statesman, January 14, 1911, p. 12, reports that Abbie is retiring from the stage to keep house for her husband and to teach her daughter how to paint.

1911, in April: Denver Franklin's paper the statesman, April 1, 1911, p. 8, p. 8, says that despite her promise to retire, she cannot help being swept back into the stage world and is performing in Chicago.

1911-1912

1911: Abbie is working again with Will Marion Cook in NYC in Darkeydom (I) in Fall 1911, and seems to be pretty much in the national swing from that point forward.

1911, in December: At the Howard in variety

1911, end of December: touring with J. Leubrie Hill's Darktown Follies company in My Friend from Dixie

Divorce from Mr. Phillips at some point.

1912, in July: Miller and Lyles and Cook have framed a big act for Hammerstein's Roof Garden, New York City, possibly for a summer run. Miss Abbie Mitchell is selected as the star female attraction (Indianapolis Freeman, July 13, 1912, p. 5)

1911-1915: lots of work in vaudeville with Will Marion Cook, and as vocal soloist with revues, and in concert. The entry on Abbie Mitchell by John Graziano in Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance (2004), v. 2, p. 803, says that she began to act in 1912.

1912-1913

Abbie makes her debut in popular priced vaudeville (Forest Parkway (NY) Leader Observer).

1913, in May: Abbie is refused a seat at Chicago's Majestic Theatre, the famous White Temple of Vaudeville; she purchased a ticket and they refused to seat her and offered a partial refund (Denver Star, May 3, 1913, p. 1)

1913-1914

1913, in fall: touring with J. Leubrie Hill's Darktown Follies company in My Friend from Kentucky

1913: seven reels survive of an unfinished, untitled movie starring Bert Williams, etc.; found at MoMA; a romantic comedy; estimated to have been intended to run ca. 35-40 minutes; uncut raw materials include over 60 minutes of raw footage (NY Times, September 21, 2014, pp. 1, 20 [first/national section]); features not just Williams but Sam Lucas, Abbie Mitchell, Leubrie Hill, and Hill's Darktown Follies company; this material is identified as Lime Kiln Club Field Day in IMDB.

1913, in fall, and 1914, in spring: soloist in concerts with Will Marion Cook and Afro American Folk Song Singers

1914, in April: in vaudeville with Will Marion Cook on the road

1914, in June: Abbie Mitchell is the guest of her mother-in-law, Mrs. Cook, at 1724 Eighth Street in DC, where she is playing leading roles in the James W. Brown Stock Company at the Howard theater (Indianapolis Freeman, June 13, 1914, p. 1);  
in fact, "In 1914 Mitchell made her nonmusical debut in The Gentleman Burglar at the Howard Theatre in Washington, D.C." (Harlem Renaissance Lives from the African American National Biography, ed. Gates and Higginbotham, p. 357)

1914, in June: in vaudeville with Will Marion Cook at Lafayette

1914, in July: Abbie and Tom Brown are in the cast of a two-reel movie that is being filmed this week, called "Uncle Remus' Visit to New York" (NY Age, July 23, 1914, n.p. [p. 6])

1914-1915

1914, in fall: Abbie is touring again with J. Leubrie Hill's Darktown Follies company in their show My Friend from Kentucky (e.g., Pittsburgh Gazette-Times, October 18, 1914, Fifth Section, p. 7)

1915-1916

1915: in the fall, Abbie briefly stars in Will Marion Cook's Darkeydom (II) and then quits.

LAFAYETTE PLAYERS, 1916-1920

Abbie is principally employed with the Lafayette Players for four years (spring 1916 to spring 1920), over five seasons, 1915-16 to 1919-20, from the inception to this group to her departure for England in 1920 to begin three years overseas. She appeared mostly on starring roles. See Tanner, Dusky Maidens (1992), pp. 111-113 for some of the parts she took on.

Abbie remembered this transition to the legitimate stage as significant milestone (Pittsburgh Courier [1954], remembering the year as 1915). She is swiftly acknowledged as a great actress (e.g., Lucien White column in NY Age, September 21, 1916, n.p. [p. 6]).

1917: Abbie appears in a feature film with a cast of all-colored players, made by the Frederick Douglas Film Company in a New Jersey studio---The Scapegoat---also starring Walther Thompson, Sidney Kirkpatrick, Leon Williams, and Mabel Young, and based on a 1904 story by Dunbar (Variety, n.d. [1917], p. 20; IMDB)



1918, in January: She prevents panic by singing a song to the audience after falling plaster halts a theatrical performance at the Lafayette (NY Clipper, January 23, 1918, p. 29)

1919, in April: Abbie, announced from the stage, sings with the New York Syncopated Orchestra under Cook's baton at its second Chicago visit, on April 21.

1919, in October: Abbie and others put on "Madame X" at the Lafayette as the Abbie Mitchell Players (NY Age, October 4, 1919, p. 7)

## ABBIE IN EUROPE

Abbie was in Europe for just over three years, over all or part of four theatrical seasons (1919-20 through 1922-23), with Will Marion Cook and on her own. **Possibly** it was during this time that she studied under Jan de Reske in Paris and Weingartner in Vienna (see NY Age, December 5, 1936, p. 000). Or was this in 1908-1908? It is during the early 1920s that she made an experimental sound movie short, probably with Will Marion Cook at the piano. On her return to the US in 1923, the Elmira (NY) Star Gazette, August 11, 1923, p. 11, says "she has been in London for the last two years appearing in a condensed version of "The Eyes of Youth," and she will be joining the Lafayette Players at the Grand in Chicago for "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" on September 2.

## 1919-1920

1920, in February: Into this month, Abbie is busy as a leading lady with the Lafayette Players, including a role in "The Madonna of the Future" at the Dunbar Theatre in Philadelphia (e.g., Philadelphia Evening Public Ledger, February 3, 1920, p. 15)

1920, in March: Abbie leaves the Lafayette Players to sail for London and either join Will Marion Cook or join the aggregation managed by Lattimore; both have been luring her to come over (NY Age, March 13, 1920, p. 6). Perhaps just as important, she is in time for the birth of her granddaughter. She performs with Cook in England, etc., so he is

probably the one who lured her over. Indeed, it is Cook who gives the Affidavit of Identifying Witness on her January 7 passport application, and the passport itself is to be sent c/o John H. Cook to Will's brother's Washington, DC, address, at 2224 6th Street. She arrives in Plymouth, England from NYC on the Carmania on March 18, 1920.

Abbie is in Europe for three years, until mid 1923, alternately appearing with the Southern Syncopated Orchestra or one of its offshoots, with Cook in variety as a duo act, or in a variety act with a male vocal quartet.

The entry on Abbie Mitchell by John Graziano in Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance (2004), v. 2, p. 803, says that it was during these years that Mitchell studied voice in Paris with Jean de Reszke and Giovanni Sbriglia.

NB: In an affidavit for a 1922 passport application, Abbie asserts that "I came to England in March 1920 to visit my ill niece."

1920, in May: Abbie Louise Douglas (who later went by Marion), granddaughter and first grandchild of Will Marion Cook and Abbie, was born on May 21, 1920, in London (so conceived immediately after wedding).

1920-1921

1920, in October: At the Palace in variety, "Another great attraction is Abbie Mitchell, a very capable singer from the Syncopated Orchestra, and Will Marion Cooke [sic], the famous conductor in Southern melodies. This is a musical treat" (Hull Daily Mail (Hull, England), October 5, 1920, p. 5).

1921, in March: At the end of her first year abroad.

William D. Burns writes the Defender on March 17, 1921 to say that the "Lattimore company blew up and is scattered all over Europe"; four members of the organization joined up as a quartet but only got a little work until Abbie joined them; the act is now "Abbie Mitchell and Her Full Harmonic Quartet" including Oscar Paul, Donald Harvey, Edwin

Covington, and William Burns himself; they have firm bookings through September 19 and "for the next three years" ("Abbie Mitchell: Famous Performer Doing Great in Dear Old Europe", Chicago Defender, April 9, 1921, p. 7); this is while Will Marion Cook is back in America

## 1921-1922

1921, in September: Abbie Mitchell and the quartette are doing "darkie folksongs at their best" (Hull Daily Mail (Hull England), September 13, 1921, p. 5)

In an amendment to her 1922 passport, dated March 1922 at the American Consulate in Coblenz, Germany, Abbie says it is necessary for her to visit German and Austria for theatrical work.

Lee de Forest made a short film *Songs of Yesteryear* (1922) of Mitchell singing, using his DeForest [Phonofilm sound-on-film](#) process. (The title is very much an Abbie - Will Marion Cook title!) This film is preserved in the Maurice Zouary film collection at the Library of Congress. Problem here in that she was in Europe. Solution: De Forest lived in Berlin from October 1921 to September 1922 working on sound-film systems, and surely could have made the film there. The 1922 phonofilm has been remastered and can be found on the Internet (Facebook). It is a two-minute take, with Abbie singing Will Marion Cook's "Mammy," and likely with Will Marion Cook on piano!

<https://www.facebook.com/video/video.php?v=10150295706081373>

This material is identified as Songs of Yesterday (1922) in IMDB. IMDB also reports that archival footage of Abbie Mitchell appears in the Warner documentary The Dawn of Sound: How Movies Learned to Talk (2007). [Not seen.] Is this from the 1922 Lee De Forest footage?

1922, in May: Abbie is at the Ardwick Empire in Manchester with the Full Harmonic Quartette, in variety (Manchester Guardian, May 1, 1922, p. 1)

1922, in May: Abbie leaves the Harmonic Quartet and rejoins the big show produced by Lattimore and conducted by Wellmon. In Vienna for over

four months, from May to the end of September or earliest October, she very well could have studied voice there as well as perform in the show (Nowakowski [2012], p. 73)

1922, in August: Abbie and Will Marion Cook are in Vienna (Chicago Defender, August 19, 1922, p. 7); Abbie has joined the Syncopated Orchestra ensemble; it was led there by Wellmon (Pittsburgh Courier, July 21, 1928, p. 5)

## 1922-1923

1922, in September: Abbie leaves the big show and goes back into variety for the 1922-1923 season. In an amendment to her passport of September 1922, made at the American Consular Service in Vienna, Abbie says that it is necessary for her to visit Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Switzerland, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway for professional work.

She begins in Vienna with appearances with a vocal quartet again, "the 5 Black Entertainers" or "The Harmonie Four & Madame Mitchel" (Nowakowski [2012], p. 73).

1922, in October: Abbie and the Harmony Four are appearing at the Parisian Grill in Budapest (Budapest, Uj Budapest, October 25, 1922, p. 4)

1922, in December: Abbie reportedly goes to Australia with some of the SSO members by December (Chicago Defender, April 8, 1923, p. 13)

1922: concerning her daughter---Salem Tutt Whitney, in his "Salem Sez" column for the Chicago Defender, writes that "Miss Marion Cook, daughter of Will Marion Cook, has returned. Miss Cook sings as only a daughter of such talented parents could sing. However, she likes dancing best, and with her husband, Mr. Douglass, made a sensational dancing team that played all over Europe" (Chicago Defender, March 3, 1923, p. 8); though this column comes out in April, Marion had to have returned in time to give birth to her son in NYC in November 1922 (see below), and in fact, Marion is back in Europe in the spring of 1923..

1922/23: The Episcopal Diocese of New York Church Records, 1767-1970, record the baptism at St. Cyprian's Chapel, on March 4, 1923, of a son, Louis Winston, born November 11, 1922 in NY Infant's Hospital, to parents Lewis Winston Douglas and Marion Abigail Douglas, with sponsors John H. and William M Cooke, and Cora Parchment. The same set of documents records the death of this child in April 1923 at the age of 5 months, and his burial on April 27 in St. Cyprian's in Washington, DC.

1923, in March: In a "Salem Sez" column by Salem T. Whitney for the Defender, Abbie is the first woman named in his "Galaxy of Stars" (all women), before Florence Mills, Gertrude Saunders, Lottie Gee, Lena Roberts, etc., etc., for about two dozen women in all; she is called "Abbie Mitchell, an international star of the first magnitude, representing the past, present, and future" (Chicago Defender, March 3, 1923, p. 8)

1923, in May: Abbie is announced as expected to appear in a Will Marion Cook benefit, but does not; she's probably not back in the US yet.

1923, in July: Abbie Mitchell arrives back in NYC from London on the S. S. Muretania (sic) on July 6 (Billboard, July 21, 1923, p. 51). She has been gone from the US for three years, from March 1920 through June 1923.

1923, in July: Abbie is quite recently back; Abbie at the Lafayette, with Will Marion Cook at the piano in several songs on a variety bill ("Love Sends a [Little] Gift," "I Passed by Your Window," and "Ladies Lips"), plus a short dramatic sketch ("the dramatic highspot from the play, "Branded," assisted by Eddie Brown"), in weeks of July 23 and July 30; Sarah Martin is the big added attraction on the bill in the second week (Billboard, July 21, 1923, p. 12; NY Age, July 28, 1923, p. 6; Pittsburgh Courier, August 11, 1923, p. 11)

1923, in August: She sings at the Grand on a variety bill in late August (Chicago Defender, September 1, 1923, p. 6)

1923-1924

1923, September: rejoins Lafayette Players. On her return to the US in 1923, the Elmira (NY) Star Gazette, August 11, 1923, p. 11, says "she has been in London for the last two years appearing in a condensed version of "The Eyes of Youth," and she will be joining the Lafayette Players at the Grand in Chicago for "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" on September 2.

1923, September: Abbie gives her first classical recital since her return from Europe on Wednesday, September 26 at a Harlem church, with accompanist Melville Charleton (NY Age, September 22, 1923, p. 6); this may point to work in Europe studying classical idioms with big-name performers/pedagogues; she often works again with Charleton; this begins a busy season of recitals for these artists

1923, in October: Abbie Mitchell gives a recital at Dunbar High, introduced by Alston Burleigh and accompanied by Melville Charleton (Washington Post, October 14, 1923, p. 30; Washington Evening Star, October 14, 1923, p. 22)

1923, in October/November: Abbie has a two-week dramatic engagement at the Avenue Theatre in Chicago; she brings her own company out from New York; in week two she will take the starring role in David Belasco's Zaza (Chicago Defender, October 20, p. 8; Variety, October 25, 1923, p. 6; Chicago Defender, November 3, 1923, p. 6)

1923, in fall/winter: Abbie takes this recital to Washington, where she appears on a concert series at the Lincoln Theatre that included recitals by Roland Hayes, Abbie, Cornelia Lambton, and Marian Anderson (Chicago Defender, January 26, 1924, p. 5)

1923: Abbie was the star attraction of the evening at a big social event of December 25 in the African American community of Chicago (Chicago Broad Axe, December 29, 1923, p. 1)

1924, in late winter, early spring: Abbie's heavy involvement with Negro Nuances; she wrote the play for the theatrical version (Chicago Defender, March 22, 1934, p. 7).

1924, in March: Abbie heads the cast in a production of "The Gold Front Stores" by the National Negro Ethiopian Art Theater Company in NYC at

the Lafayette from Monday, March 3 (NY Age, March 8, 1924, p. 6) and then with the same company starring in a Miller & Lyles drama, Going White, for the week beginning March 10

1924, in May: Abbie gives a classical song recital with Melville Charleton on Monday, May 26, singing works by Purcell, Handel, Schubert, Massenet, Brahms, etc. at the Mother A. M. E. Zion Church on West 136th St. (NY Age, Thursday, May 29, 1924, p. 6)

1924-1925

1924, in October: a few nights ago, Abbie did a recital in the auditorium of Rush Memorial AME Church on West 138th St. accompanied by Melville Charleton (NY Age, October 18, 1924, p. 7)

1925, in January: sang at big Will Marion Cook benefit concert????? Naaah.

1924, in Fall: joins Club Alabam in Harlem.

1924-1925, winter season: she is again on the roster of artists for the Lincoln Theatre in Washington, DC (Chicago Defender, November 29, 1924, p. A3)

1925: Not in 1925 Census, but at Club Alabam on West 4th St. on and off from January to the summer of 1925; working with Johnny Hudgins at the Club in January

1925, in January: The show also goes uptown to the Lafayette in January, featuring Abbie for at least two weeks; The Lafayette offers the Club Alabam Revue (i.e. here, the name of the troupe) headed by Abbie Mitchell, Johnnie Hudgins, and Eddie Rector, beginning January 19, in a show called Alabam Fantasies (NY Age, January 17, 1925, p. 6; NY Age, January 24, 1925, p. 6; Billboard, January 31, 1925, p. 50); at one point it was thought that the Lafayette appearance would begin January 12, and the players were going to be doubling between the theatre and the club (Variety, January 14, 1925, p. 46)

1925, in February: Blanche Thompson succeeds Abbie in Alabama Fantasies at the Lafayette (Billboard, February 7, 1925, p. 53).

1925, in January: Abbie gives a recital, an all-classical program, at the Lincoln Theatre in Washington (Washington Evening Star, January 29, 1925, p. 5).

1925, in February: Abbie starred in a new musical revue at the Lafayette, the Harlem Rounders, put together by the Lafayette itself, with music by J. Rosamond Johnson, opening February 23 (Billboard, February 21, 1925, p. 53; NY Age, February 28, 1925, p. 6)

1925, in March: Abbie is going to be in a dramatic sketch that is to be put into the Harlem Rounders (Billboard, March 21, 1925, p. 80).

1925, in March: Harlem Rounders is followed by International Follies, and will be followed in turn by The Mikado, all mounted by the new resident company, of which Abbie is one of the principals (Billboard, March 21, 1925, p. 21).

1925, in April: Appeared in recital in Philadelphia on April 17 (Chicago Defender, April 4, 1925, p. 8; Pittsburgh Courier, Saturday, April 25, 1925, p. 2)

1925, in May: Abbie, very busy in 1924-25, is the soloist in a vocal recital on Friday, May 22, 1925 during the May Music Festival of the Bluefield Colored Institute in Bluefield, WV.

1925, in June: Abbie sang at a big memorial/benefit on June 14 in NYC (Pittsburgh Courier, June 20, 1925, n.p. [cut off]).

1925, in June: son Mercer marries on June 24.

1925, July: Back into Club Alabam work. She's been added to the bill at the Club Alabam as a special fature; Johnny Hudgins is vacationing, and Hartwell Cook is substituting for him (NY Age, July 18, 1925, p. 6)

1925-1926



- 1925 in fall: not part of the Hotsy-Totsy French adventure at all; announced for Too Bad, but then featured at Club Alabam
- 1925, in September: Abbie is announced as a star of the forthcoming Too Bad, for which she and Jesse Shipp wrote the book with music by Sidney Bechet and Donald Haywood, with Will Cook producing (Chicago Defender, September 26, 1925, p. 6), but this production does not get off the ground.
- 1925, in October: Abbie will star in the newest version of the revue at the Club Alabam, opening October 6 (Billboard, October 3, 1925, p. 20).
- 1925, in October: Abbie will do a concert performance with the Harlem Symphonic Orchestra at the Renaissance Casino (Chicago Defender, October 24, 1925, p. 7).
- 1926, in January: Billboard prints that the Club Alabam Fantasies, the show at the Club Alabam, starring Johnny Hudgins and Abby Mitchell, will go over to London intact and open there in March (Billboard, January 23, 1926, p. 13)
- 1926, in April: Abbie "has been starring in songs at a famous Broadway night club" (Chicago Defender, May 1, 1926, p. 6), which is the Club Alabam, where she heads the bill (Billboard, May 1, 1926, p. 23)
- 1926, in April: Abbie Mitchell marries again (NY Age, April 24, 1926, p. 7; Chicago Defender, May 1, 1926, p. 6), this time to a Mr. Thompson or Thomkins or Tomkins or Tompkins, a NY postal clerk (Age) or an art student (Defender); he acts as her manager; they divorce in 1931 (see below). Leslie A. Tompkins (1904-1937) is 20 years younger than Abbie, and younger than her children (Defender dwells on his age and says he is said to be not over 21 but is really just 19).
- 1926, in May: Abbie is at the Club Alabam; with Johnny Hudgins going to Europe with Florence Mills, she is headlining now with George McClellan and Jean Starr (Pittsburg Courier, May 22, 1926, p. 10)

## 1926-1927

1926, in September: Abbie opens the fall concert season with an appearance September 17 at the Rush Memorial Church on a program with the Negro String Quartet (NY Age, October 23, 1926, p. 7)

1926, through the fall: She is out on the road under the baton of ex-husband Will Marion Cook in Miss Calico in Fall 1926; this may be her last extended work with Cook; from now, after this show, she mixes pretty steady Broadway-level theatrical work with recitals for a couple of years.

1926, in December: Abbie takes the role of Muh Mack in the Pulitzer-prize-winning Paul Green play, In Abraham's Bosom, Dec 1926 to June 1927

1927, in February: a phonofilm, "The Sensation Seekers," in which sound and action are synchronized using the invention of Lee De Forest, offers the current review at the Club Alabam, with artists including Abbie Mitchell, Johnny Hudgins, and Jean Starr, assisted by a chorus of 20 (Washington Evening Star, February 6, 1927, p. 61 [part 3, p. 3])

1927, April: a supporting role in House of Shadows, April to May 1927 (Billboard, April 30, 1927, p. 15)

## 1927-1928

1927, in September: brief return to role of Muh Mack in In Abraham's Bosom

1927, in October: Coquette opens in Atlantic City tomorrow night (Washington Evening Star, October 9, 1927, p. 61 [part 3, page. 1])

1927, in November: Abbie is appearing in recital at Steinway Hall on Sunday, November 6 (NY Times, October 16, 1927, p. X9)

1927, in November: the role of Julia (a "Mammy") in Coquette with Helen Hayes on the road for a month, and then on Broadway for a year, Nov. 1927 to Sept. 1928

1928, in January: On January 15 Abbie sang for Maurice Ravel at a swank party in a private Madison Avenue home, along with other African American artists, including the Hall Johnson Jubilee Singers; also, some of the black cast of Showboat did three dances from the production (New York Times, January 16, 1928, p. 14)

1928, in February: Abbie Mitchell will assist in a concert today by the Hall Johnson Jubilee Singers (New York Times, February 12, 1928, p. 117)

1928, in the spring: still in Coquette

1928-1929

1928, in September: Broadway run of Coquette ends and it goes on the road.

Performs in Coquette on tour with Helen Hayes for another year (e.g., from Christmas night, 1928 in Chicago, etc.)

1929, in spring/summer: the show closed in mid 1929, while on tour, due to Hayes's pregnancy (NY Times, September 7, 1929, p. 21)

1929, in August: Abbie appears in a new production of In Abraham's Bosom in a summer season of Negro plays at Philadelphia's Hedgerow Theatre (Philadelphia Inquirer, August 4, 1929, p. SO 5; Philadelphia Inquirer, August 11, 1929, n.p. (illeg.); Hill and Hatch, p. 229)

1929, in September: Abbie joins a new company, the "New Lafayette Players," for a production of George V. Hobart's Experience in Los Angeles at the Lincoln Theater (Los Angeles Times, September 21, 1929, p. A7)

1929: "From 1929 to 1931 she was featured as the "Studebaker Songbird" on the Studebaker Radio show" (Harlem Renaissance Lives from the African American National Biography, ed. Gates and Higginbotham, p. 357)

1929-1930

1929, announced in October: Abbie appears in one evening of a year-long series of concerts at Tuskegee, in a song recital (Chicago Defender, October 26, 1929, p. 6)

1929, in December: She appears on December 20 in recital in Talladega (Chicago Defender, December 28, 1929, p. 11)

1930, in January: major recital of songs in German, French, and English in Chicago at Kimball Hall on Friday night, January 17 (Sylvester Russell review in Pittsburgh Courier, February 1, 1930, p. 16; Chicago Defender, February 1, 1930, p. 5)

1930, in April: recital in NYC at St. Mark's M. E. Church (Chicago Defender, April 19, 1930, p. 11)

In the 1930 US Census, Leslie and Abbie Tomkins are living in Brooklyn at 248 Adams Street with [her granddaughter] Marian Douglas; this might be his sister's house; Abbie is called 35 although she is actually 45, while Leslie is 25; Abbie is a concert singer. Leslie (born ca. 1905) is from Florida.

## 1930-1931

1930, in September: big wire service article dateline Chicago, September 18 (A.N.P.), about marital woes of Leslie Thompkins and Abbie. They were married in NYC slightly more than four years ago. He manages her concert engagements. She claims he's been unfaithful and contemplates divorce proceedings. He's suave and handsome. (Philadelphia Tribune, September 18, 1930, p. 7; Pittsburgh Courier, n.d., Illustrated Feature Section, p. 1: HUBBY LOVES TOO MANY WOMEN, DIVA DECLARES/MARITAL ROMANCE OF ABBIE MITCHELL SAID TO BE HEADED FOR ROCKS).

1930, in October: Chicago recital in orchestra Hall on a Tuesday night before October 30, as reported in Chicago Daily News and over ANP on October 30---Brahms, De Falla, Massenet, etc. (Pittsburgh Courier, Saturday, November 1, 1920, p. illeg.)

1930, in November: on Friday, November 14, Abbie sings in recital at Armstrong High in DC with German, English, French, and Italian songs (Baltimore Afro American, November 22, 1930, p. 3)

1931, in January: "Abbie Mitchell, stage and radio star, in the role of a Negro mammy cook; Marlin Hart, in the role of a small Negro boy, and Bob White as a chauffeur, start a new program series interpreting famous Negro spirituls over an NBC blue network including KFAB, at 8:45 tonight." (Omaha World Herald, January 27, 1931, p. 29, etc.)

1931, in April: in 1931 her husband is in NYC directory. In early April of 1931 her husband attempts to commit suicide at his sister's house in Brooklyn (Baltimore Afro American, April 18, 1931, p. 8), an article that pointedly mentions that he is 26 and she is 46 and that their marriage caused a "mild sensation."

Leslie A. Thomkins is in the 1931 NYC Manhattan city directory on 442 St. Nicholas Ave, and this is probably him; they were probably divorced or separated at this point.

Abbie divorces Leslie Anthony Thomkins some time later during the year (Kansas Plaindealer, December 4, 1931, p. 3); he marries again late that year, and succeeds in suicide in 1937

## 1931-1934 TUSKEGEE

### 1931-1932

1931, in the fall: Getting out of NYC and regrouping, she takes a position at Tuskegee. She is at Tuskegee for three academic years, 1931-1932, 1932-1933, 1933-1934. (NY Age, May 13, 1933, p. 7); she also does recitals during these years, featuring German lieder, etc.

1931, in November and December: major all Negro song solo recital (all lyrics by African Americans, but some composers white) at Chicago's Civic Opera Theatre on the Sunday, November 8 (Topeka Plaindealer, November 13, 1931, p. 3; Baltimore Afro American, November 14, 1931, p. 4) and then in New York at Town Hall

on Sunday afternoon, November 22 at 2:00, in songs by Burleigh, Coleridge-Taylor, Carpenter, Hall Johnson, Kurt Pahlen, etc. (to German translations of lyrics by Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen); strongly favorable NYT review by "H.T." (NY Times, November 15, 1931, p. X9; NY Times, November 19, 1931, p. 26; NY Times, November 23, 1931, p. 25; Topeka Plaindealer, December 4, 1931, p. 3; review by Carl Diton for ANP in Pittsburgh Courier, December 5, 1931, p. A9)

1932, in July: sings in recital on Tuesday, July 12 at [Greensboro] A. and T. on Race Relations Day (Greensboro Daily News, July 9, 1932, p. 3)

1932-1933 Tuskegee

1933-1934 Tuskegee

1933, in October: Abbie sings a recital at the Central YMCA, Brooklyn, doing lots of new material, including "A Little Bit of Heaven Called Home" to Mercer lyrics and Will Marion Cook music, and she'll be on tour this fall before returning to teach at Tuskegee (Chicago Defender, October 28, 1933, p. 5)

1934, in February: sings in recital on Sunday, February 18 at the new Amytis Theatre in the Poro College Building in St. Louis (Kansas City Plaindealer, February 16, 19234, p. 4)

1934, in July: she sings Santuzza in Cavalleria Rusticana with an all-Negro opera company at Mecca Temple in NYC (Chicago Defender, June 30, 1934, p. 8; NY Times, July 8, 1934, p. X4)

1934, in August: Abbie sings Santuzza in Cavalleria Rusticana in Harlem at Salem M. E. Church at 129th and Seventh, in a production with piano accompaniment, to a small audience (NY Age, August 11, 1934, p. 5).

1934, in August: she appeared in the big Chicago pageant; in Part III, presenting music and dance of the modern age, Abbie Mitchell sang "Red, Red Rose" with Cook at the piano and took a leading role in the version of St. Louis Blues conducted by W. C. Handy

## 1934-1935

1934, in fall: leaving Tuskegee, she returns to the stage. She has a role as Binnie in Stevedore in NYC in Oct-Nov and on the road

1934, December: she is on the bill of the Band Box Revue at the Apollo (Baltimore Afro American, December 1, 1934, p. 9)

1935, in February: she sings in recital in Chicago on Feb. 17 and is honored beforehand at a tea (Chicago Defender, February 9, 1935, p. 6)

1935, in March: she sings at the Chicago funeral of Richard H. Harrison on March 19 (NY Times, March 20, 1935, p. 21)

1935, in April: Abbie organizes the Abbie Mitchell Players in Chicago, where she is living, to put on standard dramas with amateur performers for Chicago audiences; Bertha Moseley Lewis will direct the group (Pittsburgh Courier, May 11, 1935, first section, p. 8; Chicago Defender, July 13, 1935, p. 7; Chicago Defender, June 1, 1935, p. 10; Chicago Defender, August 10, 1935, p. 18)

1935, in August: Abbie appears in the Artist Night concert at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Negro Musicians (NANM), August 25-29, in NYC, along with Todd Duncan; both of them would shortly be on stage in Porgy, which was probably already in rehearsal

## 1935-1936

1935, in September: Abbie Mitchell takes the role of Clara in Gershwin's Porgy and Bess in fall 1935, at age 52, and is essentially engaged with it for one entire theatrical season: Boston premiere, September 30, 1935, then on Broadway for three months, October 10, 1935 to January 25, 1936 (was to close January 18 and then had a week's reprieve), and then on tour for two months from January 27 in Philadelphia through March 21 in Washington, D.C. This seems to be her last major singing role on stage. Her big number is "Summertime."

A rehearsal performance of Porgy and Bess on July 19, 1935 was

recorded, and includes Abbie singing "Summertime" under Gershwin; this material has been published and frequently re-issued.

1936, in March: the Abbie Mitchell Players put on productions in Chicago; Abbie is not directly on hand; they are called "a little theatre movement or guild" and it is in "an embryonic stage," with direction by Bertha Mosely Lewis (Chicago Defender, March 28, 1936, p. 3, 4)

1936, in April: Abbie gave a recital at Howard last Sunday (Chicago Defender, April 11, 1936, p. 5)

1936, in July: She sings on network radio on the Hammerstein Music Hall program, as Abby Mitchell of "Porgy and Bess" (Chicago Tribune, July 14, 1936, p. 14; Washington Post, July 14, 1936, p. 18)

1936-1937

1936, in fall: On the road, on tour in Langston Hughes' Mulatto. Mulatto ran on Broadway from 10/1935 to 9/1936, then played for two seasons on the road (and was on the West coast in 1939). Abbie stepped into the role of Cora Lewis, the mother/mammy. This role had been originated by Rose McClendon, who died in July 1936. Abbie sang at her funeral services (NY Age, July 18, 1936, p. 8). Abbie was known for her performance of "Cora's soliloquy" (Baltimore Afro American, September 23, 1950, p. 11)

1936, in December: she had been expected to take part in a NYC recital on Sunday, December 6 at St. James Presbyterian Church that was the first in a series sponsored by the newly organized Musical Art Group, but she could not appear (NY Age, November 21, 1936, p. 9; Pittsburgh Courier, December 12, 1936, Section 2, p. 8)

1937, in February: her ex husband is an apparent suicide, in ANP release out of Chicago (Baltimore Afro American, February 27, 1937, p. 000)

1937, in May: Abbie takes part in a "Cavalcade of Colored Music" coast-to-coast over WABC on May 13 (Pittsburgh Courier, May 15, 1937, p. 19)



1937, in May: Abbie will be a featured vocalist on a W. C. Handy broadcast for National Music Week on the radio show "Cavalcade of America"; it will be a running history of Negro music entitled "Songs of the South" (NY Age, May 1, 1937, p. 9)

1937-1938

Still in Mulatto in fall 1937, for a second season, 1937-1938.

1937, in September: Abbie is a founding officer of the Negro Actors Guild (NY Age, October 29, 1949, p. 24).

1937, in November: in Mulatto at the Majestic Theatre in Brooklyn, (Ridgewood Times, Friday, November 26, 1937, p. 3)

1937, in December: Singing on radio in Hammerstein's Music Hall on WABC (Tarrytown Daily News, December 10, 1937, p. 14)

1938: there was a West Coast production of Porgy, evidently intended at first to include Abbie, since the New York cast was anticipated; rehearsals began in spring 1937 and then were put on hold with Gershwin's death; rehearsals resumed on New Year's Day, 1938 and there were performances in Pasadena, LA and San Francisco in February; Abbie was not in the production, and the role of Clara was taken by a local Los Angeles actress, Lois Hodnutt (Los Angeles California Eagle, February 3, 1938, p. Eight-A; Los Angeles California Eagle, February 10, 1938, p. Ten-A)

1938, in February: Abbie appears with the American Negro Ballet at Wood Auditorium in Mount Vernon, Westchester County, on Friday, February 25 (Mount Vernon Daily Argus, February 24, 1938, n.p. [illeg.])

1938, in April: in the weeks of April 3 and April 11, in Brooklyn, Mulatto, with Abbie, re-opens for a week's run at Werba's, and is held over for a second and final week (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, April 3, 1938, p. 8; Brooklyn Daily Eagle, April 6, 1938, p. 18; Brooklyn Daily Eagle, April 10, 1938, p. 8; NY Age, April 16, 1938, p. 1; NY Post, April 12, 1938, p. 8)

1938-1939

Fall of 1938??

1939, in February: Little Foxes

Abbie holds the role of Addie in Lillian Hellman's play The Little Foxes for over two years, across three seasons, with Tallulah Bankhead in starring role of Regina: spring 1939, then on Broadway in 1939-1940 and on tour in 1940-1941 (at least into March 1941)

1939-1940

Abbie is in Little Foxes for the whole season

1939, in October: Abbie is feted at the Sky Club by a large group of Harlemites for her years of theatrical activities and her assistance to other Negro actors (NY Age, October 21, 1939, p. 4)

1940, in August: Abbie temporarily leaves Little Foxes at the end of its Chicago run to serve as technical adviser and also act in the American Negro Exposition production called "Cavalcade of the Negro Theatre," written by Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps, running at the Coliseum in Chicago from July 4 to Labor Day, September 2 during the American Negro Exposition (an ANP article by Etta Moten: Chicago Defender, June 8, 1940, p. 4; Wichita Negro Star, June 14, 1940, p. 1; Chicago Defender, June 2, 1945, p. 7)

1940-1941

Little Foxes all season, to March 1941

1940 in November: an article on W. C. Handy goes out over the A.P. newspaper wires in which he is quoted as thinking that "Abbie Mitchell is the top blues singer of today because she has a voice that will move with ease from scat to spirituals and therefore has a range that falls

easily into the mood of the blues" (San Diego Union, November 3, 1940, p. 54, etc.).

1941, in March: end of the run of Little Foxes

1941, in August: Abbie will appear for a week in a production of The Little Foxes at the County Theatre in Suffern, NY (NY Daily Worker, August 25, 1941, p. 7)

1941-1942

1941, in October: on October 20, 1941, Abbie is a guest star on a musical radio program with Dr. Frank Black's orchestra, "For America We Sing," on WBZA at 9:30 p.m. [8:30 pm Central, over NBC-WDSU] (Springfield (Mass.) Republican, October 19, 1941, p. 42; New Orleans Times-Picayune, October 20, 1941, p. 23)

1942, in June: she will be on the staff of the Atlanta University summer school of the theatre, to teach dramatics, and will be the first professional across to appear in that summer program; she sang at Spelman several years ago (Chicago Defender, June 6, 1942, p. 8)

1942, summer: Abbie is on the staff of the Atlanta U. Summer School of the Theatre (Plaindealer (KC), June 12, 1942, p. 6); she acts with son Mercer and grandson, Mercer, jr., and granddaughter Marion in a summer theatrical production of White Oaks running July 9, 10, 11 in Atlanta that thus features three generations of Cooks (Baltimore Afro American, July 11, 1942, p. 10; Philadelphia Tribune, July 11, 1942, p. 2; Chicago Defender, July 11, 1942, p. 7)

1942-1943

1942, in the fall: Abbie sets up the Abbie Mitchell Players in NYC

1942, in December: Abbie Mitchell will appear in an entertainment, "Stars for Victory," as a benefit for Russian War Relief, at Rockland State Hospital, on behalf of Helen Hayes, who is chairman of the Rockland County

Committee for Russian Relief, alongside Lena Horne, W. C. Handy, etc. (New York Times, December 2, 1942, p. 34; New York Times, December 10, 1942, p. 35; Chicago Defender, December 12, 1942, p. 10)

1943: She directed and starred in The Eternal Magdalene for the Ira Aldridge Players and performed in White Dresses for the Harlem Boys' Club (Harlem Renaissance Lives from the African American National Biography, ed. Gates and Higginbotham, p. 357)

1943-1944

1943, in December: Abbie and the Abbie Mitchell Players doing "Cry Havoc" (NY Age, December 11, 1943, p. 10)

1944, in February: Abbie and the Abbie Mitchell Players do "Four Episodes in the Life of Harriet Tubman" for the past two Sundays (NY Age, February 12, 1944, p. 11)

1944, in February: Abbie Mitchell Players do a repeat performance of their "Harriet Tubman" with Abbie in the title role, at their Workshop Studio, a playhouse at 35-43 West 125th St. (NY Age, February 26, 1944, p. 10)

1944, in April: The Abbie Mitchell Players present a dramatic duo, the McInnis-Hagey Team, in an evening of drama at the Work Shop Studio, 35-43 West 125th Street (NY Age, April 8, 1944, n.p. [illeg.])

1944, in April: She is living at 240 West 112th St. (NY Age, April 29, 1944, p. 4)

1944, in June: On June 18, there will be a repeat performance of last December's Cry Havoc, mounted by the Frederick Douglas Players of the Harlem Peoples Art Group, directed by Abbie Mitchell, at the Hecksher Theatre on Fifth Ave. at 104th Street (NY Age, June 17, 1944, p. 10)

1944, in June: On June 26, 1944 Abbie is one of the stars in a huge pageant at Madison Square Garden, New World A-Coming (Hill and Hatch, p. 531)

1944, in July: Will Marion Cook died on July 19, 1944. In the Washington DC certificate of death for Cook, who was taken there to be interred, she is Mrs. Abbie M. Cook (hit in familysearch.org)

1944, in August: radio station WNYC has a regular Tuesday evening program at 5:30 hosted by Lola Hayes and devoted to music of Negro composers; on Tuesday, August 8, Abbie Mitchell made a guest appearance on a program devoted to music of the late Will Marion Cook (NY Age, Saturday, August 12, 1944, p. 10; Chicago Defender, September 9, 1944, p. 9)

#### 1944-1945

1945, in June: She will spend her third season with the Summer Theatre at Atlanta University (Chicago Defender, June 2, 1945, p. 17).

#### 1945-1946

1945, in December: she is a member of a new Negro repertory theater troupe, the McKinley Square Players, based at the McKinley Square Theatre in the Bronx, and she is appearing from December 22 in the first bill of this venture, Arsenic and Old Lace (NY Times, December 12, 1945, p. 36; Hill and Hatch, p. 534)

1946, from March to September: in On Whitman Avenue as Cora Bennett; she joins rehearsals in March (NY Times, March 16, 1946, p. 10); the show runs in Buffalo from April 10, in Detroit from April 15, in NYC from May 8 to September 14 (Chicago Defender, March 23, 1946, p. 17; other newspapers; Hill and Hatch, p. 339)

#### 1946-1947

1946, in December: elected (honorary) Executive Secretary of the Negro Actors' Guild---an outstanding member of the profession is chosen yearly for this position (New York Times, February 12, 1946, p. 000; Pittsburgh Courier, Saturday, February 23, 1946, p. 16)

1947, in January: Abbie is master of ceremonies at the official opening of the Solidarity House, Harlem's IWO Community Center at 124 W. 124th St. (NY Age, January 25, 1947, p. 5).

1947, in the summer: Abbie appeared in The Skull Boat, starring Fay Bainter, in Westport, CT., acc. a program in the possession of son Mercer Cook. See: Jo Tanner, Dusky Maidens: the odyssey of the early black dramatic actress (Greenwood, 1992), p. 128 and see also <http://www.blackpast.org/aah/mitchell-abbie-1884-1960>

1947: Abbie has a role in the comedy "race" movie Junction 88 (IMDB).

1947-1948

1948-1949

At some point in her career, Abbie Mitchell was associated with the teaching staff of Harlem music teacher, music dealer, and business woman Frances Kraft Reckling (NY Age, July 30, 1949, p. 11).

1949-1950

1950, in March: Abbie participates in a press party called by the Negro Actors Guild in NYC at the Hotel Theresa, called to let the press know that the guild is in greater need of funds than ever before in order to support its efforts to engage the young in theater (LA California Eagle, March 16, 1950, p. 15).

1950-1951

1950, in September: She joins the staff of the Metropolitan Music School, the same fall as there is the first mention of the Will Marion Cook scholarship there (NY Times, September 13, 1950, p. 41)

1950, in September: Abbie is honored at a tribute event in Chicago, a testimonial to her ("Capacity Crowd Cheers Abbie Mitchell Tribute," Chicago Defender, September 23, 1950, p. 9, 10)

1951, in April: Abbie is elected to the executive board of the Negro Actors Guild (Chicago Defender, April 21, 1951, p. 8).

1951-1952

1952-1953

1952, in September: There are plans to convert the play Dark of the Moon from a white to a colored cast, and Abbie Mitchell is being negotiated with for a role in the show (Chicago Defender, September 13, 1952, p. 22)

1953-1954

1954, in February: Nice appreciation of Abbie in Pittsburgh Courier in an article, "Remember Abbie Mitchell?" by A. C. Sterling (Pittsburgh Courier, February 27, 1954, "Courier Magazine Section," p. 3) with biographical details

1954-55

1955-1956

1956, in January: "Abbie Mitchell, the great singer and actress who began to make a name for herself years ago when she was only fourteen years old, is still teaching youngsters how to sing in New York" (Pittsburgh Courier, January 21, 1956, p. 9)

Obit in Amsterdam News (New York Amsterdam News, March 26, 1960, p. 4) says that "she taught voice and coached singers at a West 125th St.

studio until about five years ago when her eyesight began to fail," which would mean her teaching career came to an end around 1955/1956.

1956-1957

1957-1958

1958-1959

1959, in January: Abbie was one of two honorary chairmen of a testimonial for Chicago musician, teacher, and choirmaster Thomas Theodore Taylor, with whom she apparently studied voice (Chicago Defender, February 7, 1959, p. 22)

1959: the entry on Abbie Mitchell by John Graziano in Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance (2004), v. 2, p. 803, says that Mitchell "was asked to appear in Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun," but for health reasons she could not. That show opened on Broadway in March 1959.

1959-1960

1960, in March: Abbie Mitchell died at age 77 [76] on Wednesday, March 16, 1960 in NYC at Harlem Hospital, "after a long illness." Her home is given as 149 W. 87th St. (NY Times obit; Pittsburgh Courier obit, April 2, 1960, p. 24); in that obit, son Mercer is alive and there are two grandchildren; no mention of Marion daughter or granddaughter. Obit in Amsterdam News (New York Amsterdam News, March 26, 1960, p. 4) mentions Mercer and his sons, and granddaughter Marion Douglas Quick.

Obituary in Chicago Defender, March 22, 1960, p. 17, spelling her name "Abbey Mitchell"; it highlights her career as an actress and calls her, alongside Laura Bowman, as "one of the two greatest actresses of modern times."

News reports of Abbie Mitchell's death, and later retrospectives, tend to agree on 1884 as her birth year, but for 1883, see the top of this biographical chronology.





## BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE

Several biographical accounts were published during her lifetime in the newspapers, e.g., "Miss Abbie Mitchell, America's Greatest Colored Singer, Now Appearing in Drama" (Indianapolis Freeman, December 23, 1916, p. 9; "We Sneak An Interview With Abbie Mitchell" (Detroit Tribune, April 27, 1940, p. 4); "Abbie Mitchell Reviews History/ Tells of First Negro at Carnegie" (Detroit Tribune, June 8, 1940, p. 11); "A Little Outside Help Pushes Abbie To Fame" (Chicago Defender, September 23, 1950, p. 20); Interview in "Courier Magazine Section" (Pittsburgh Courier, February 27, 1954, p. 3), etc.; interviews with her are often sprinkled with fairly consistent biographical details, e.g., marriage at 14.

There are relatively references to or short entries for Abbie Mitchell in several recent books and biographical dictionaries. Many of these are about of the same length and present very similar material. See:

- 2009. Henry Louis Gates, jr. and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, eds., Harlem Renaissance Lives from the African American National Biography (Oxford University Press, 2009).
- 2009. Anthony D. Hill, with Douglas Q. Barnett, eds., Historical Dictionary of African American Theater (Scarecrow Press, 2009).
- 2004. Cary D. Wintz and Paul Finkelman, eds., Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance, vol. 2 (Routledge, 2004).
- 2003. Darryl Glenn Nettles, ed. African American Concert Singers Before 1950 (McFarland, 2003).
- 2001. Bernard L. Peterson, jr., ed., Profiles of African American Stage Performers and Theatre People, 1816-1960 (Greenwood Press, 2001).
- 1999. Anne Commire and Deborah Klezmer, eds., Women in World History: A Biographical Encyclopedia (1999).
- 1993. Darlene Clark Hine, Elsa Barkley Brown, and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, eds. Black Women in American: An Historical Encyclopedia (Carlson Publ., 1993)1992.
- 1992. Jo A. Tanner, Dusky Maidens: The Odyssey of the Early Black Dramatic Actress (Greenwood, 1992); Tanner, "The Emergence and Development of the Black Dramatic Actress, 1890-1917" (Ph.D. thesis, City University of New York, 1989)
- 1992. Jessie D. Carney Smith, ed., Notable Black American Women (Gale Research, 1992).

1990. Rosalyn M. Story, And So I Sing: African-American Divas of Opera and Concert (Warner Books, 1990).
1982. Rayford W. Logan and Michael R. Winston, eds., Dictionary of American Negro Biography (Norton, 1982).
1982. Eileen Southern, ed., Biographical Dictionary of Afro-American Musicians (Greenwood Press, 1982).
1980. Barbara Sicherman and Carol Hurd Green, Notable American Women---the Modern Period: A Biographical Dictionary (Harvard University Press, 1980).

And see also Henry T. Sampson, The Ghost Walks: a chronological history of blacks in show business, 1865-1910 (Scarecrow Press, 1988).

## DAUGHTER MARION COOK

MARION ABIGAIL COOK DOUGLAS (1900-1950)

1900: Born March 22, 1900 in NYC at Sloan Maternity.

1904: She is coming back from Liverpool to NYC on the Campania, age 4 years, 4 months, sailing July 2 and arriving July 9, with her grandmother (NYC Passenger Lists)

1905: In NY State 1905 Census with Mother, father, and brother on West 62nd Street.

1910: Living with her brother at James and Isabel Howard's home, in DC in the 1910 Census (at 724 or 1724 somethingth street, with data torn off at the edge; from the page before, and other sources, this has to be the family home at 1724 8th St.); other lodgers include two members of her mother's family, the Holidays.

1912, in June: Marion Cook and her cousin Louise Cook performed in a production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" at the Howard as a benefit for a settlement house under the auspices of the Colored Teachers' Benefit and Annuity Association (Washington Evening Star, Sunday, June 2, 1912, p. 71 [Part 7, page 6])

1912, in July: Did Marion go to high school in DC or NYC? If in DC, when did she graduate, and from which high school? Possibly she is the "Marion Cook" referred to as being promoted from the second semester to the third semester at the Armstrong Manual Training School (Washington DC Evening Star, July 3, 1912, p. 7, under the heading "High School Promotions"); this would project out to have her graduating after 8 semesters in the spring of 1916, at age around 16.

1916, in June: a giant pageant is staged at Howard University, featuring students from many of the black schools, including M Street High School and Armstrong; one of the features was dancing, and one of the principals was Marian Cook, which could be her (Washington Evening Star, June 22, 1916, p. 10);

[NB: Will Marion Cook is in town in June 1917; could this be for Marion's graduation then?? See Washington Bee, June 16, 1917, p. 5]

In 1940 US Census she says her highest level of education is 4th year of high school.

- 1919: Marion A. Cook (born March 22, 1900 in NYC, age 19, father Will Marion Cook, occupation is dancer and singer, and residing at 221 West 138th St.) applies for a passport to go abroad to England to do concert entertainment; sworn May 17, 1919, stamped for fee received on May 19, 1919, stamped as approved on May 27, 1919.
- 1919: Will Marion Cook brought daughter Marion with him to England in 1919 with the Southern Syncopated Orchestra, and there she met Louis Douglas (1889-1941) and married him on August 15, 1919 (US Passport appl. 1923 and Lotz data); it was so sudden that it sounds as if they had to have known each other already, but a 1927 Pittsburgh Courier of Louis profile says they met in Europe, and thus they could not have known each other for more than about four weeks. Not clear how Marion and Louis met, but Louis Douglas was surely working in London.
- 1920: Their daughter Abbie Louise Douglas (who later went by Marion), granddaughter and first grandchild of Will Marion Cook and Abbie, was born on May 21, 1920, in London (so conceived immediately after wedding).
- 1920-1922: Marion and Louis often dance together on stage.
- 1922, in June: Marion and daughter return to the states, departing Southampton on June 14, 1922 on the S. S. Olympic and arriving in NYC on June 21, 1922; their British address is 1a Southampton Row, London.
- 1922, in November: son Winston is born.
- 1923, in March and April: The Episcopal Diocese of New York Church Records, 1767-1970, record the baptism at St. Cyprian's Chapel, on March 4, 1923, of a son, Louis Winston, born November 11, 1922 in NY Infant's Hospital, to parents Lewis Winston Douglas and Marion Abigail Douglas, with sponsors John H. and William M Cooke, and Cora Parchment. The same set of documents records the death of this child in April 1923 at the age of 5 months, and his burial on April 27 in St. Cyprian's in Washington, DC.
- 1923: Salem Tutt Whitney, in his "Salem Sez" column for the Chicago Defender, writes that "Miss Marion Cook, daughter of Will Marion cook, has returned. Miss Cook sings as only a daughter of such talented parents could sing. However, she likes dancing best, and with her husband, Mr. Douglass, made a sensational dancing team that played all over Europe" (Chicago Defender, March 3, 1923, p. 8)

1923: US Passport Application sworn March 16, 1923, stamped received March 17, 1923 and stamped issued March 19, 1923 says Marion married Louis Douglas in Grimsby, England on August 15, 1919, and that she lived in London from June 1919 to June 1922; now she wants to visit England, France, Brazil; she's a dancer; and her permanent address in US is 321 W. 138th St.

1924: She and Louis were announced for her father's Negro Nuances (Chicago Defender, March 22, 1934, p. 7).

1924: From March through September, Marion Cook and Louis Douglas star in the revue "Tout Nue" at the Concert Mayol in Paris (numerous French papers; Wikipedia).

NB: in the European papers of the 1920s and 1930s, Marion is sometimes identified as Marion Cook and sometimes as Marion Douglas. If there is any pattern or tendency, she is Marion Cook before and after La revue nègre, but Marion Douglas with the revue in 1925.

1924, in May: there is pressure to drive American musicians and their jazz bands out of France; Louis and Marion are among the race men and women living in Paris (Chicago Defender, June 7, 1924, p. 6)

1925: Passenger list of June 15, 1925 says Louis and Marion are residents of Oslo, Norway, and that they will be living in NYC at 146 West 124th St., which is Alice Payne's home. Daughter Marion is not on the passenger list.

1925: NYC Census has all three--Louis, Marion, and daughter Marion---living with Alice Payne at 146 W. 124th in NYC with lots of cousins at the time of the 1925 NYC Census, during their sojourn before La revue nègre.

1925-1926: Marion appears in Hotsy Totsy (La revue nègre), the dance tab created for her and her husband; where Louis is variously credited, but he is the big star in every number. Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Spain.

1926: She is in Paris (Chicago Defender, May 1, 1926, p. 6).

1926: in Berlin, Black People

1927: Louis back to US for Africana, and Marion arrives in NYC on June 21, 1927 with her husband and daughter.

1927: passenger list, returning from Cherbourg to NYC in June 1927 with husband and child, says her permanent US address is 232 W. 138th.

- 1927-1928: Louis and Marion in his Black Follies in Brussels, Milan, Rome, Paris (in December), Rotterdam, Den Hag, Utrecht, etc.
- 1930 passenger list, returning from Cherbourg to NYC in April 1930 with husband and no child, has 232 W. 138th St. as permanent address
- 1930: Marion and Louis arrive back in NYC on May 2, 1930, without their daughter, who is living right now with Abbie and Abbie's current husband. Daughter Marion was living with grandmother Abbie and husband Tompkins in Brooklyn in the US 1930 Census.
- 1936: Louis is leading a troupe in a revue in Paris, with Marion, at the Alcazar, called "Harlem Blackbirds 36" (Le Petit Journal, May 1, 1936, p. 6; Le Petit Parisien, May 17, 1936, p. 6).
- 1936: Marion is ill in hospital in Paris in 1936.
- 1937: Lewis is falsely reported as dying in Italy in May 1937.
- 1937: They are back in USA in 1937. He arrives from Naples, Italy, in NYC, headed for 232 West 138th St., on July 29, 1937.
- 1937: Marion and Louis send their daughter to Spelman, the historically black college for women in Atlanta, in 1937. "Her family had migrated back to the United States in 1937" (J.-C. Baker, Hungry Heart, p. 368, from personal contact with Marion); granddaughter Marion Douglas is in a photo (NY Age, Saturday, December 3, 1938, p. 10; Chicago Defender, December 3, 1938, p. 6) where she is identified as a foreign student from Naples, Italy at Spelman College in the class of '41 (and thus who had entered college in the fall of 1937).  
NB: Her uncle Mercer and his family are also in Atlanta.
- 1940: In 1946, at the time of the settling of the estate of her father, she and Louis were said to be of New York in 1940, when the will was written.
- 1940: Marion and Louis are in the 1940 US Census; they are lodgers at 364 W. 116th St., but with wrong professions and wrong year and place of birth for Louis. He's 47 and she's 40, and she is born in NYC and he is born in NJ; in their entries, he's a laborer and she's doing housework for a private family.
- 1941: Louis dies in May, 1941. His obit has them living at 364 W. 116th St.
- 1944: Marion said to be in London, as "Mrs. Louis Douglas of London," in NY Age obit for her father in 1944.

1950: Marion died in 1950. Only one source that I have come across offers a death date for her. It is referred to in a biographical article on her mother Abbie:

Hine, Darlene Clark, editor. "Mitchell, Abbie." Facts on File Encyclopedia of Black Women in America: Theater Arts and Entertainment. New York: Facts on File, Inc. 1997. American Women's History Online. Facts on File, Inc. <http://fofweb.com/>

At the time of Abbie's death in 1960, the New York Times obit mentions only Mercer and two grandchildren as survivors (his boys). The Amsterdam News obit mentions Mercer and three grandchildren (his boys and Marion's daughter); granddaughter Marion Douglas Quick is said to be a teacher in the NY public schools.

On Will Marion Cook's granddaughter Marion (Marion Douglas Quick, a.k.a. Maranantha Quick), who was an actress, acrobatic dancer, director of a children's drama program, and French teacher in the New York public schools, see <http://mosaic.echonyc.com/~goldfarb/douglas.htm>



## SON-IN-LAW LOUIS DOUGLAS

LOUIS DOUGLAS (1889-1941)

Louis Douglas was a contemporary of Maurice Chevalier; and about ten years younger than Bill "Bojangles" Robinson. He was one of the greatest African-American dancers of his generation, with a career almost entirely unfolding in Europe; also, a choreographer, film and stage actor, pantomimist, singer, promoter, producer, director.

### NAME

Louis Winston Douglas (also, Douglass; also, infrequently, Lewis; in 1938, some of the publicity for Policy Kings identifies him as Winston Douglass).

Douglas was born May 14, 1889 in Philadelphia according to a passport application of 1907, and etc. Here he spells his name Lewis Douglass. Offers same date/place on passenger list of 1925. Same spelling of last name in obit. But most often Louis Douglas. Father is Fred Douglas, mother Ellen Douglas, and family home is 506 South 12th Street in Philadelphia.

Norris Smith's Chicago Defender "Deare Old Lunnon" column almost always spells the name Louis Douglass, as does Edgard A. Wiggins's "Across the Pond" column a decade later.

NB: Passport applications in 1907, 1913, 1914, 1915, 1922, 1923.

### CAREER

1903-1919:

Toured Europe with busy career as child prodigy/star and then adult dancer.

1903: in England from 1903, age ca. 14, in "pickaninny" roles

1909: by age 20, on his own professionally as an "eccentric" dancer

- 1916: In October, he is entering his third season working at the London Pavilion, dancing in a new revue (Chicago Defender, October 21, 1916, p. 5).
- 1918: his draft registration card records him as a Music Hall artist who is touring England in revue.
- 1919: Will Marion Cook brought daughter Marion with him to England in 1919 with SSO, and there she met Louis Douglas (1889-1941) and married him on August 15, 1919 (US Passport appl. 1923 and Lotz data); sounds as if they had to have known each other already, but 1927 Pittsburgh Courier with Louis profile says they met in Europe, and thus they could not have known each other for more than about four weeks. Not clear how Marion and Louis met. They were just under 11 years apart in age. Louis Douglas was in London from May-November 1918 (acc. Chicago Defender hits). Did he come back to the states for a while in early 1919? Evidently not. He had never returned to the US since he went to Europe.

#### 1919-1920

- 1920, in January: Reporting on Douglas in London in late 1919 for the Defender, Norris Smith gives a precis of his career from 1903 to the present, and says he was at the London Pavilion for four years (which would be through 1917-1918); he is currently at the Empire in a duo with Walton (Chicago Defender, January 3, 1920, p. 7).
- 1920, in May: Their daughter Abbie Louise Douglas (who later went by Marion), granddaughter and first grandchild of Will Marion Cook and Abbie, was born on May 21, 1920, in London (so conceived immediately after wedding).
- 1920-23: Douglas works with wife Marion in a duo between her pregnancies. When she is unavailable he works with dancer Sonny Jones on the variety stage in a duo in England and France, with a larger company in a big act including 12 girls, touring England in Me and My Gal (a three-scene show with sparkling comedy full chorus, and clever dancing).
- 1920, in August: Louis Douglas is working with partner Sonny Jones and 12 girls in a variety act called "The Shurley Girl" at the Coliseum (London Times, August 31, 1920, p. 8)

## 1920-1921

1922, in February: Douglas is at the Palace in Manchester in Sawing Thro' a Woman, with Sonny Jones, etc. (Manchester Guardian, April 23, 1921, p. 1)

## 1921-1922

1922, in February: Douglas is at the Empire in Manchester in Me and My Gal, a sparkling comedy from America in three scenes, with Sonny Jones, Nancy Lorrison, etc. (Manchester Guardian, February 17, 1922, p. 1)

## 1922-1923

1922-1923, in December and January: Louis Douglas is pairing with familiar partner Sony Jones in France while Marion is back in the States to have their second child;

"Les formidables danseurs américains," Douglas and Jones, are at the Embassy in Paris (e.g., L'Intransigeant, December 30, 1922, p. 4; Le Figaro, January 4, 1923, p. 4; Le Journal, January 6, 1923, p. 4)

1922, in November: son born November 11 in the US; the Episcopal Diocese of New York Church Records, 1767-1970, record the baptism at St. Cyprian's Chapel, on March 4, 1923, of a son, Louis Winston, born November 11, 1922 in NY Infant's Hospital, to parents Lewis Winston Douglas and Marion Abigail Douglas, with sponsors John H. and William M Cooke, and Cora Parchment.

1923, in April: The same set of documents records the death of this child in April 1923 at the age of 5 months, and his burial on April 27 in St. Cyprian's in Washington, DC.

1923: US Passport Application sworn March 16, 1923, stamped received March 17, 1923 and stamped issued March 19, 1923 says Marion married Louis Douglas in Grimsby, England on August 15, 1919, and that she lived in London from June 1919 to June 1922; now she wants to

visit England, France, Brazil, Argentina; she's a dancer; and her permanent address in US is 321 W. 135th St.

1923: Marion returns to France, and Louis and Marion come up in the world of the French variety stage, working with Chevalier and Mistinguett

1923, April-May: appearing at Ba-ta-Clan

1923-1924

1923, May to October: Louis and Marion were on a South American tour with Mistinguett including Buenos Aires, Argentina and Brazil

1924: Douglas is announced as returning for his father-in-law Will Cook's theatrical version of Negro Nuances in the spring (Chicago Defender, March 22, 1934, p. 7), but he does not return for this show, which did not get off the ground.

1924, in February: "Les célèbres danseurs nègres Louis Douglas et Marion Cook ont été engagés pour la prochaine revue du Concert Mayol" (Paris-soir, February 10, 1924, p. 5; another announcement of their engagement for this show in L'Intransigeant, February 13, 1924, p. 2)

1924, March through December: TOUT NUE  
back in a Paris show (nine months in all, as accurately reported in Pittsburgh Courier, July 16, 1927, p. 8); Louis and Marion, "de l'Hippodrome de New-York," are principals in the revue Tout Nue (or La Revue tout nue) at the Concert Mayol, from at least March through the end of December and into earliest January 1925; the headlining star was Gaby Montbreuse (see, e.g., Le Figaro, October 15, 1924, p. 3).

1924, in May: there is pressure to drive American musicians and their jazz bands out of France; Louis and Marion are among the race men and women living in Paris (Chicago Defender, June 7, 1924, p. 6)

1924, in July: Louis and Marion appear at a private soirée "chez M. et Mme Etienne Gaveau" (Lyrica no. 29 (July 1924), p. 329)

1924, in August: MIDNITE SHUFFLE ALONG  
a mid-night show in Paris, which Louis Douglas and Palmer Jones are presenting at "The Seymour," "a swell Parisian cabaret," and featuring Miss Florence, Marion Cook, Tony Mitchell, Opal Cooper, Sonny Jones, Earl Granstaff, Briggs, Elmer Certain, Harvey White, Hall, Mable White, and the "International Five"; this is "the first appearance of a real all-

Colored midnight show in Paris" (Chicago Defender, August 2, 1924, p. 7)

## 1924-1925

1924, in the fall, and into January, 1925: Tout Nue runs all fall and at least into the first week of January, 1925 (Le Figaro, January 1, 1925, p. 4).

Douglas reportedly ran a revue in Sweden for eleven months somewhere in this time frame (Pittsburgh Courier, July 16, 1927, p. 8), but this does not square with either the runs of Tout Nue or La revue nègre

## 1925-1926

### LA REVUE NEGRE

1925, in June: "Louis Douglas, colored, husband of Marion Cook, daughter of Will Marion Cook and Abbie Mitchell, now divorced from Mr. Cook, arrived in New York Monday with his wife from abroad. Both Mr. Douglas and Miss Cook are dancers, having been in Paris and Petersburg, the former having also studied abroad for some time. Young Douglas went to Europe when he was six years old and has not been back to the States since that time" (Variety, Wednesday, June 17, 1925, p. 6).

1925, in June: He's back in NYC, reportedly for a short stay (NY Age, June 27, 1925, p. 6)

1925: Husband and wife and child are living with grandmother Alice Payne and cousins in NYC at time of 1925 NYC Census, during sojourn before La revue nègre. Passenger list of 1925 says they will be living in NYC at 146 West 124th St. [and Alice Payne in 1922 NYC directory has home at 146 W. 124th]

1925: before leaving for Europe with the revue, he staged the dance numbers for the new show for the fall at New York's Connie's Inn (Chicago Defender, October 10, 1925, p. 7); he "was in a position to give us something new from across the pond, and he did. His leaning seems to be more to high kicks, splits and back-bends."

1925, in October: HOTSY TOTSU, a.k.a. LA REVUE NEGRE this famous show opens in Paris on October 2, 1925, and runs in Paris and on tour of Europe through at least next April; Douglas is the

producer, director, and principal dancer; he is the big star in every number (until overshadowed by Josephine Baker) in Paris and then on tour in Berlin, Vienna, Spain, etc.

A big article on Louis Douglas in the Courier (Pittsburgh Courier, July 16, 1927, p. 8), at the time of Africana, says of Douglas that "he formed the revue for Carolyn Dudley, which contained Josephine Baker and which he named Revue Negre for its Paris opening. After fourteen weeks in Paris and two months in Berlin, he was forced by bad health to stop work for six months." NB: This claim of illness does not quite fit with a hit on Douglas and De Forest starring in La revue in April of 1925.

In February, Douglas and Josephine ("von der Negerrevue") make a cabaret appearance outside the show (Berliner Tageblatt, February 20, 1926, p. 12)

1926-27

#### BLACK PEOPLE

After no more than about two months off, Douglas is back in Berlin with an all-colored revue that he has put together, Black People, first at the Palast Am Zoo in June (e.g., Pittsburgh Courier, June 26, 1926, p. 10), and then at the Metropol-Theater, where it ran nine months from mid July 1926 into 1927; after it closed in Berlin it then went on tour to Athens, Cairo, Marseilles, Lyons, Nice, Frankfurt, Sweden, etc., and back to Berlin (Pittsburgh Courier, July 16, 1927, p. 8, etc.); Denmark, Hamburg, Munich, Düsseldorf, Zurich; they were a month in Egypt before going on to Marseilles (Chicago Defender, May 28, 1927, p. 6); personnel included Bechet, Marion, Spencer Williams, acc. Lotz; with Maud De Forest, Hattie Reaves, F. Mores (Berliner Volkszeitung, July 14, 1926, p. 2); with Arabella Fields, Maud De Forest, F. Mores, Babe Goins, Honey Boy Thompson (Berliner Tageblatt, July 14, 1926, p. 4; Berliner Börsenzeitung, July 15, 1926, p. 9)

1926: at least all fall, Louis and Marion themselves, after getting Black People going, appear in the musical revue Von Mund zu Mund in Berlin at the Grosse Schauspielhaus, and Douglas staged the shows dances and ensembles (see, e.g., Billboard, November 13, 1926, p. 48).

1926, in November: Douglas is identified in a big Billboard advertisement for bookings in Germany, as "Dance Producer at Grosse Schauspielhaus, Berlin" (Billboard, November 13, 1926, p 18; see also Billboard, December 11, 1926, p. 43).

1927, in February: Douglas and Cook are in Berlin in the Charell-Revue (Berliner Tageblatt, February 5, 1927, p. 10 Berliner Tageblatt, February 15, 1927, p. 22).

1927: A passenger list, upon his return from Cherbourg to NYC in June 1927 with wife and child, says their permanent US address is 232 W. 138th.

1927: Louis is back to US for Africana, to stage it, and to star in it for a few summer weeks (before his return to Europe for the 1927-1928 season). In the most specific references, he stages the dances and ensembles.

#### 1927: AFRICANA

Louis Douglas comes back to the US in order to stage/direct the dances and ensembles, and he casts himself in a number with Ethel Waters in the second part where they are "Countess Josephine" and her Count. Opens in late July in NYC without out-of-town tryouts. He is there through late summer, and then back to Europe. The Douglas role then is turned over to the show's composer, Donald Heywood.

One review (by Salem Tutt Whitney, in Chicago Defender, July 23, 1927, p. 7), says that Douglass "does an eccentric dance that places him in a class with the renowned George Cohan."

Another review of Louis Douglas in Africana gives us some insight into what the earlier Hotsy-Totsy began as:

"Second to Miss Waters on the bill---and in his own way equally as splendid, is Louis Douglas. When he appears on the stage one is immediately transported to distant shores. His mannerism, style of dancing and make-up are of the European music halls and safes. He is the complete antithesis of Miss Waters. She is distinctly racial! He is absolutely foreign. And when they work together in a satirical scene as the Countess Josephine and her Count, we have a marvelous example of two distinct heights to which colored performers can rise. Mr. Douglas is a real artist and has [a] sense of humor tinged with pathos that is most

appealing. He is a brown Charley Chaplin"  
(Pittsburgh Courier, shortly after July 21, 1927, 2nd section, page 2:  
"Geraldyn Dismond Reviews Broadway Shows").

This echoes with the comment of Jacques Charles (p. 156) on what he saw when the troupe first rehearsed in Paris: "L'erreur était d'avoir voulu fair parisian!! Il fallait faire nègre!"

1927-1928

## BLACK FOLLIES

1927, from fall on: Louis and Marion in his Black Follies, a revue in two acts and six scenes, in Brussels, Milan, Rome, Naples, Bologna, Florence, Milan, Trieste, Venice, Turin, Paris (in December, at the Opera d'Alger), Madrid, Barcelona, Rotterdam, Den Haag, Utrecht (February 2, 1928), etc.; Features Louis Douglas and Marion Cook, Arabella Fields, Hattie King Reavis, Babe and Bobby Goins, Honey Boy Thompson, Francis Mores, etc. (Paris, L'Echo d'Alger, December 12, 1927, p. 4; Mazzoletti, Il jazz in Italia (2004), p. 208)

The six scenes are:

Le mariage du Charleston et du Black-Bottom

Plantation du Coton

Watermelon Plantation

The Black Follies' Minstrel Concert

La Nouvelle Orléans

Douglas' Black Follies Cabaret

(L'Echo d'Alger, December 12, 1927, p. 4)

NB: by March 1928, Baby Goins is in a music hall revue in Paris

1928, in May: Douglas is in a "kleine Revue" in Berlin (Neues Wiener Journal, May 22, 1928, p. 11); this is probably the revue with Douglas at the Komödie mentioned in Billboard, June 2, 1928, p. 34.

1928, in June: Douglas is in Burlesque, an American comedy, given in a production by Max Reinhardt at the Deutsches Theatre in Berlin under the title Artisen (Billboard, June 23, 1928, p. 9; Billboard, July 7, 1928, p. 9)

1928, in June: Sam Wooding's Die schwarze Revue opened in Berlin; according to a program, "it was choreographed in part by Louis Douglas" (Wipplinger, The Jazz Republic: Music, Race, and American Culture in



Weimar Germany [2017], p. 125); this is surely the revue at the Ufa Palace am Zoo mentioned in Billboard, June 23, 1928, p. 9

1928-1929

## BLACK FOLLIES

1928, in August: A second season of Black Follies; according to a Floyd G. Snelson column in the Courier about Baby Goines, Goines joined the "Black Follies" in August of 1928 and toured Berlin, Brussels, Antwerp, Venice, Rome, Alexandria, Milan, Lisbon, Barcelona, Paris, through March 1929 (Pittsburgh Courier, no date visible [July, 1931, after July 23]); Goines was already aboard the season before (see above)

1928, in August/September: The Louis Douglas Band and Creighton Thompson are at the Delphi Palace in Berlin (Billboard, September 1, 1928, p. 55)

1928, in November: Douglas himself is in variety in Vienna (Wiener Zeitung, November 7, 1928, p. 9)

1929-1930

## LOUISIANA

1929, in October: Douglas mounts the show Louisiana, with many of the former Black Birds as members of the troupe, is on the road in Europe, in Barcelona, a Bordeaux, and Copenhagen, and will open in Egypt in December and then travel back through Turkey, Greece, and Italy to Paris, and then they will do a new show for the spring and summer of 1930 (Chicago Defender, November 9, 1929, p. 7); the reference to Black Birds is probably to members of Lew Leslie's troupe of that name, which had been touring in Europe; Florence Mills first arrived with the Blackbirds in 1926, in a show specifically called "Black Birds 1926"; Leslie's "Black Birds 1929" was in Paris in the summer of 1929; note that in 1936 Douglas puts together a show for Paris called "Harlem Black Birds 36" (see below).

In September 1929 they are in Madrid, and then in Barcelona at the Teatro Nuevo, from which a Parisian reviewer singles out Douglas, and "son fidèle partenaire [Sonny] Jones, et, dans le rôle de Louisiana, l'aimable comédienne et chanteuse Marion Cook" (Paris, Comoedia,

September 26, 1929, p. 2); Marion Cook has a leading role (Billboard, October 19, 1929, p. 44).

1930: Douglas and his troupe, the Black Birds, are coming to Lausanne at the end of April for two days, with the show Louisiana, and he is "Le célèbre et plus fort danseur nègre du monde" (La Tribune de Lausanne, April 22, 1930, p. 4; Gazette de Lausanne, April 23, 1930, p. 2)

1930, in April: Douglas is named on a passenger list, returning on the Aquitania from Cherbourg on April 26, 1930, arriving in NYC May 2, 1930 with wife but no child; gives 232 W. 138th St. as permanent address

1930, in June: Louis and Marion are in his musical comedy, Louisiana, with 46 former members of the cast of Blackbirds, that has been in Barcelona, Bordeaux, and Copenhagen, and will go to Cairo, Alexandria, Smyrna, Constantinople, Athens, and to Italy and Paris (Chicago Defender, November 9, 1929, p. 7); they have been to Egypt, Turkey, Greece, Germany, Netherlands, Spain, Italy, etc., and will shortly open in a new show, Liza (Chicago Defender, June 21, 1930, p. 5).

1930, in August: "Miss Louisiana" (sic) will be playing Copenhagen this month (Chicago Defender, August 30, 1930, p. 5); in fact, it is "Liza" that is meant (see immediately below).

1930: in the US 1930 Census, daughter Marion is living with grandmother Abbie in NYC at this time

1930-1931

LIZA

On stage in Paris in June and into July 1930 with Marion, etc., in Black Flowers, an operette-revue that is a big production (Chicago Defender, June 21, 1930, p. 5) and in June they will open in a new show; in fact, to clarify, this is actually his *troupe*, the Black Flowers, in the show Liza, an operette-revue, in two acts, 8 tableaux, and 45 scenes; in Paris from June 3, 1930 thru at least July 6, at Le théâtre nègre (Porte-Saint-Martin), with Marion Cook, etc.; the big stars are Douglas and Valada Snow  
(Le Figaro, June 3, 1930, p. 6; Paris, L'Homme Libre, May 29, 1930, p. 3; Wall Street Journal, July 7, 1930, p. 4, etc.);

Liza goes on the road to Sweden, Copenhagen, etc. at the end of the summer of 1930; the troupe plays Latvia and Estonia in late July and early August (newspapers: e.g., Douglas's show Lisa, presented by his troupe, Black Flowers, and starring Valada Snow, is in Riga, Latvia (Riga, Rigasche Rundschau, no. 166 [July 28, 1930]); also Copenhagen in August 1930 (Chicago Defender, August 30, 1930, p. 5); Lotz (p. 350, 352) places Hartwell Cook in this company; on tour into 1931; in Germany and to Berlin for a run in May (Pittsburgh Courier, March 21, 1931, p. 8); in Warsaw by April 1931 and Amsterdam in September 1931; See also Lotz, Black People, and Andy Fry, Paris Blues (2014), pp. 70-75, on this show.

1930: Douglas is a dancer in the German film Einbrecher (The Burglar, a comedy); he appears in a couple of cabaret scenes with Sidney Bechet leading a dance band; Flagrant délit is the French version of this film

1931: Douglas has a role in the late Weimar-era German film Der brave Sünder

1931: Douglas is a principal actor in the late Weimar-era (1931) German film Niemandsland, which was released in the US as Hell on Earth in 1933; Douglas's 1931 motion picture, the European-made anti-war film Hell on Earth, which was recently voted the best of the war films, should be shown in the US very soon (Chicago Defender, May 6, 1933, p. 5); he is "the Negro international music hall artist who functions as interpreter for the German, Frenchman and Englishman," or "in which he portrays a vaudevillian turned soldier" and "steals the picture" (New York Times, January 29, 1934, p. 10; Chicago Defender, March 17, 1934, p. 5)

1931-1932

LOUISIANA

1931, in July: Next big vehicle is a revue-operetta, Louisiana; launched in Berlin in July at the Berliner Künstler Theatre (NY Evening Post, August 8, 1931, p. 4 D; Riga Rigasche Rundschau, n. 159 (July 22, 1931); Neues Wiener Journal, July 25, 1931, p. 11), and then on tour in Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Spain, Italy, Egypt, etc.; see, inter alia, Utrecht Nieuwsblad, August 25, 1931, p. 7

1931, in December: Douglas and his troupe had been touring Italy but have now left for Egypt (Billboard, December 12, 1931, p. 17)

1932-1933: Apparently still on tour with Louisiana

1933: Hitler throws Louis Douglas and other black artists out of Germany, and as a citizen of France, he returned to France (Chicago Defender, May 6, 1933, p. 5)

1933-1937

Choreographer of revues at the Casino de Paris; also, appearing on stage and on tour over these years

1933, in July: Douglas is at the Victoria Cinema in Turin (Billboard, July 1, 1933, p. 10).

1933, in October: Douglas is in Rome with a colored tabloid revue at the Corso, a picture house (Billboard, October 28, 1933, p. 6).

1934, in February: "Louis Douglas et ses 10 Nègres" (Feuille d'avis du Valais, February 6, 1934, p. 3)

1936, in May: HARLEM BLACK BIRDS 36

"Voici Louis Douglas revenu à Paris" (Comoedia, May 11, 1936, p. 2); From May 2, Louis is leading a troupe in a revue in Paris, with "Marion Cook", at the Alcazar de Paris, in Harlem Black Birds 36, identified as being from the Cotton Club in New York (Le Matin, April 29, 1936, p. 8; Le Petit Journal, May 1, 1936, p. 6; Le Petit Parisien, May 17, 1936, p. 6; etc.; plus, much information on this show in Lotz, Black People); most of the month of May at the Alcazar, then on tour (Nice, Liège, etc.)

1936-1937

1936: Marion is ill in hospital in Paris in 1936.

1936, in November: Douglas is one of the artists appearing in Paris on the program of a grand benefit at the Palais d'Orsay, "Grand Bal de Nuit" (Paris, L'Univers israélite, November 6, 1936, p. 15)

1937: Louis is falsely reported as dying in Italy in May 1937. In correspondence with Alain Locke, Will Marion Cook is worried about his daughter and son-in-law in Europe, and writes to ask for money to get Douglas home.

1937, in June: an article in a Parisian paper, in recalling the recent history of blacks in Parisian music halls, mentions Douglas in connection with La revue nègre, Liza, and Harlem Blackbirds 36 (Paris, Ce soir, June 20, 1937, p. 6)

1937, in July: The Douglas-Cook family is back in the USA in 1937. Douglas arrives on the Conte di Savoia from Naples, Italy, to NYC, headed for 232 West 138th St., travelling from July 21- July 29, 1937. Story in one obit about how hard it was to get out of fascist Italy: he was prevented from boarding a ship home in Milan, and an appeal reached all the way to Mussolini, who enabled his departure (Pittsburgh Courier, May 24, 1941, p. 23).

## 1937-1938

1937: Louis and Marion send their daughter to Spelman College in Atlanta in 1937. (Spelman is a historically black college for women.) "Her family had migrated back to the United States in 1937" (J.-C. Baker, Hungry Heart, p. 368, from personal contact with Marion); granddaughter Marion Douglas is in a newspaper photo (NY Age, Saturday, December 3, 1938, p. 10; Chicago Defender, December 3, 1938, p. 6) where she is identified as a foreign student from Naples, Italy at Spelman College in the class of '41 (and thus who had entered college in the fall of 1937). NB: Uncle Mercer and family are also in Atlanta.

1938: Louis is with the Carol-Inn Players, opening the first Negro summer theatre, in Gordon Heights, L. I.; Douglas "worked with Max Reinhardt, staged revues at the Folies Bergère in Paris and travelled with his own troupe in continental Europe" (NY Age, May 28, 1938, p. 7; see also NY Post, May 28, 1938, p. 32; Brooklyn Daily Eagle, June 5, 1938, p. 7)

## 1938-1939

1938, in October: "Louis Douglas, dancer, director, and comedy artist---he's the son-in-law of Will Marion Cook, has joined the staff of the Harlem Suitcase Theatre as a director. He's been directing his own theatre groups in France, Italy, and Germany with Reinhardt" (Washington Afro-American, October 22, 1938, p. 8; see also Chicago Defender, November 12, 1938, p. 18); the well-known Harlem Suitcase Theatre was founded in 1937 by Langston Hughes.

1938, in December: Douglas directs the musical comedy in two acts, Policy Kings; a big deal, anticipated with interest in the newspapers nationally; after some delays, it opened on Broadway at the Nora Bates Theatre on December 30, 1928;

Peterson, A century of musicals, p. 273;

From the casting, which, for example, also included Bessie de Saussure, it sounds as if Douglas may have influenced the hiring of performers recently returned from Europe due to the political situation there;

Enid Raphael will portray the role of Santa Clara, and the show is said to be opening on December 26 (Chicago Defender, December 17, 1938, p. 19); same picture and caption, but with first name Edna, in Pittsburgh Courier, December 17, 1938, n.p.; "Enid" is her name, and she had performed in the Douglas troupe in Paris in the mid 1930s.

Enid Raphael and George Dewey Washington will take the leadings roles, and it will open on December 26 (NY Times, November 17, 1938, p. 28);

It was going to open on Christmas eve night but hit a snag and will be slightly postponed, and stars "Miss Enid Raphael, who recently came here from Europe" (Chicago Defender, December 31, 1938, p. 6); on the postponement see also the NY Times, December 27, 1938, p. 12 and NY Times, December 30, 1938, p. 11

a Harlem-based story; Douglas wrote the lyrics for some of the songs, to music by James P. Johnson, who is credited with the score (NY Sun, December 24, 1938, p. 24; NY Sun, December 31, 1938, p. 22); directed by "Winston Douglass," it is "a snappy, spicy, care-free jamboree of song and dance rhythm," and with many principal performers who have international reputations and experience (from the substantial review by Floyd G. Snelson in NY Age, January 7, 1939, p.

1); also reviewed in NY Times, December 31, 1938, p. 6

"Harlem woogie: novelty song", lyrics Louis Douglass, music James P. Johnson (New York: Joe Davis, Inc., 1939), for Policy Kings, "directed by Louis Douglass"

The show closes after only three performances (Chicago Defender, January 4, 1939, p. 18; see also NY Times, January 2, 1939, p. 29), but was anticipated to be revived in the fall of 1939 if financial backing could be found (Chicago Defender, August 26, 1939, p. 20)

1939, in February: Porter Grainger is presenting a "Panorama of Negro Folklore" at the Alhambra Ballroom on Friday evening, February 17, with a huge program including many distinguished African American performers, and "Louis Douglas, recently from 30 years in Europe and formerly assistant director to the famous Max Reinhardt in Germany, will direct the entire program" (NY Age, February 18, 1939, p. 7; Chicago Defender, February 18, 1939, p. 10)

1939, in August: Louis Douglas is staging the dancing for an all-colored musical, Caribbean Cruise, to a score by Donald Heywood, that will be presented in mid-August at the NY World's Fair British Pavilion (Pittsburgh Courier, August 5, 1939, p. 20)

1939-1940

1940: Louis and Marion are in 1940 US Census, with right names, and at 364 W. 116th St., which is right address (obit confirms this), but with surprising (or wrong) professions, and the wrong year and place of birth for Louis. He is said to be 47 and she is 40, and she is born in NYC and he is born in NJ; he's a laborer and she's doing housework for a private family. They are living as lodgers at 364 W. 116th in US 1940 Census; in 1946, at the time of the settling of the estate of her father, Marion and Louis were said to be of New York in 1940, which was when the will was written. Louis obit has them living at 364 W. 116th St.

1940-1941

1940, in December: Tan Manhattan, a musical revue in two acts, with Louis Douglas in the cast, went into rehearsal on December 21.

1941, in January: Tan Manhattan opened on the road at the Howard Theater in Washington, D.C. on January 22 (Washington Evening Star, January 23, 1941, p. 41).

1941, in February: Douglas opened in Harlem at the Apollo Theatre on 125th Street in producer Irvin C. Miller's Tan Manhattan with score by Eubie Blake, lyrics by Andy Razaf, talent including Flourney Miller, etc., on February 7, 1941 after rehearsals beginning December 21 and "break-in" performances for a week in Washington, DC at the Howard beginning January 22 (though once anticipated to open January 20). It is the first big black musical in several years. The show runs in New York for at least two months, and is still at the Apollo in an advertisement of March 29, 1941, saying it is running in the week beginning Friday, March 28 (NY Age, March 29, 1941, p. 10).

Smithsonian has a digitized program from the Howard on January 26 ([https://transcription.si.edu/view/8889/ACM-ACMA\\_06-042\\_53c](https://transcription.si.edu/view/8889/ACM-ACMA_06-042_53c)). In Act I, Douglas is in scene 5 and 7; in Act 2, he is in scene 1, a sketch called "Tan Town Divorce," where Louis Douglas is the dancing plaintiff, "Joe December."

[On this show, see NY Age, December 28, 1940, p. 4; Chicago Defender, January 18, 1941, p. 20; Washington Post, January 23, 1941, p. 9; NY Age, February 1, 1941, p. 4; Chicago Defender, February 1, 1941, p. 20; NY Age, February 8, 1941, p. 4; Chicago Defender, February 8, 1941, p. 21; NY Age, February 15, 1941, p. 4, all mentioning Louis Douglas in the cast.]

A few months after the opening, Flourney and Irvin Miller were among the pallbearers for Douglas.

NB: Long thought to be lost, the score to the 1941 review Tan Manhattan was found, restored by Robert Kimball, and restaged in 2003 (NY Times, November 6, 2003, p. E2; Chicago Tribune, November 10, 2003).

1941, in May: Louis Douglas died on Friday, May 16, 1941 at Harlem's Sydenham Hospital (not Friday, May 19, 1939, which Lotz reports and which has spread to other secondary accounts); he did not survive an



emergency operation; he dies the Friday before Thursday, May 22, when an article is written in NYC that is printed in the Pittsburgh Courier on Saturday, May 24. There is a report of the death in a medium-sized article with a deadline of NYC May 22, in Pittsburgh Courier, May 24, 1941, p. 23 ("Louis Douglas, Veteran Theatrical Man, Is Dead"). At the side of the "veteran actor" were Abbie Mitchell and other family members.

See also Chicago Defender, May 24, 1941, p. 20 ("Son-In-Law of Marion Cooke Dies"; died on Friday; they lived at 324 W. 116th St.).

Final rites for Louis Douglas were Sunday, May 25, 1941.

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#### SON MERCER COOK

MERCER COOK, over a long career, was a distinguished author, editor, translator, scholar, professor, actor and singer, lyricist and songwriter, member of ASCAP, US diplomat and ambassador.

William Mercer Cook (1903-1987), was born March 30, 1903, in Washington, DC.

Since his father, Will Marion Cook, was baptized William Mercer, Mercer could have been called Will jr., following standard tradition, but in this family, it is Mercer's older son, Will's grandson, who gets called Mercer, jr.

Image of Mercer in New York Age as a child singer/actor, at the age of 4 (NY Age, February 20, 1908, p. 6).

His childhood was split between NYC and DC; he was raised primarily by both sets of grandparents while his parents pursued peripatetic professional careers.

1911: If it is him, one Mercer Cook of James W. Patterson School in Washington, DC did a recitation at the Washington's Birthday observations (Washington Evening Star, February 19, 1911, p. 4)

1914: Mrs. Josephine Jefferson [Aunt Josephine] held a birthday dinner for a friend at her residence in New York City on Thursday, July 23; among the invited guests named in the paper was Mrs. Alice V. Payne; "After the repast the guests were entertained by Masters Mercer Cook and Leon Irving"; he's eleven (NY Age, July 30, 1914, n.p., in "News of Greater New York")

1914, in December: The eleven-year-old Mercer Cook sings at a Music School Settlement concert (NY Age, December 31, 1914, n.p. [p. 6])

1915, in January: Mercer was elected third vice-president at the first meeting of the Young Folks' Choral Society and Physical Culture Club at the Music School Settlement on Saturday, January 9, 1915; he's still just eleven (NY Age, January 16, 1915, n.p., in "News of Greater New York")

1915, in June: Mercer is one of the Royal Pages in a production of "Fairyland," involving fifty children, at the Music School Settlement's grand parade and May Festival (NY Age, June 3, 1915, n.p. [6])

1916-1920: presumably, four high school years in DC; he was presumably living at his paternal grandmother's house with his cousin Hartwell

1920: Dunbar High in Washington, DC, 1916-1920. Class of 1920. He was seventeen. Same year as his cousin Hartwell. (Sterling A. Brown was a 1918 graduate and a friend.)

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## ELLINGTON

It would have been during his high school years in DC at Dunbar---if not before---that Mercer got to know Edward Kennedy (Duke) Ellington (1899-1974), who named his first child after him. Mercer Cook lived with his paternal grandmother and her husband at 1724 8th St. NW, and in 1917 Ellington was living with his father at 1703 8th St. NW, that is, across the street and just down the block (acc. DC city directory).

Ellington's father and mother are James Edward Ellington (1878 - ) and Daisy Kennedy Ellington (c. 1878 - ), who married on January 3, 1898; their son was born in April 1899. In 1909 the Ellington family was at 1200 T; in 1910, 1912, and 1913, James and Daisy were in service at 1805 13th St NW, and they were at 1816 13th in 1915. In 1918, they were at 1621 K. In 1922 directory, and 1923 they are at 1212 T (and 1928, and 1931). They lived at 2007 K in 1924.

Ellington married Edna Thompson (1898 - 1967) on July 2, 1918, shortly after he turned 19, and they moved first to 1955 3rd Street and then 1206 T. St. and then to 2728 Sherman (they are at 2728 Sherman in the US 1920 Census). Mercer Ellington (1919-1996) was born under nine months after the wedding, on March 11, 1919, so he was conceived while the Cooks were neighbors on R street. In the US 1920 Census, dated January 7, 1920, Edward is 20 and Edna is 21, and son Mercer is 10/12 months old.

NB: Edna is said to have been a neighbor who lived across the street from the Ellingtons as well as having also attended Armstrong Technical High School. Some accounts say she grew up across the street; other accounts say they knew each other in grammar school; one account says she attended Dunbar. Mark Tucker says she and Ellington met in high school, at Armstrong. Edna's obit in the Baltimore Afro American, January 14, 1967, p. 21, says she attended Dunbar while Ellington attended Armstrong.

A second son born a year later (1920) died in infancy. Edna's obit in the Baltimore Afro American, January 14, 1967, p. 21, has her dying in January 1967, which other good sources attest, while some secondary sources say 1966. An ad for an article in the March 1959 issue of Ebony that ran in Baltimore Afro American, February 21, 1959, p. 42, says she was a childhood sweetheart, a classmate for 12 years, and married him before age 20. Obituary in Jet, (Jet, February 2, 1967, p. 46-47) says she was born on August 4, 1898 and dropped out of high school and married at age 16, which does not square with marriage to Ellington in 1918! And at the same time, if she was born on August 4, 1898, then she was just a hair under twenty years old (Ebony/Afro American) when she married in July 1918, and was 21 in the 1920 Census, so 1898 looks good.

In the US 1900 Census, Edna Thompson, born August 1898 in DC, is 1 year old and living with her grandparents Dyons Lynch (barber; b. May 1853) and Lavinia Lynch (b. July 1851) and her mother Lula Thompson (28; born January 1872) at 716 23rd St. NW, with some of Edna's aunts. In the US 1910 Census, grandfather's name is Dines P. Lynch (age 60) and grandmother is Lavenia (age 62); Edna is living with them, age 11, at 1314 T. Street (Precinct 8), with some of the aunts, who are public school teachers. NB: in Washington DC city directories there are lots of entries for barber Dines P. Lynch from 1867 to 1919. In 1910 he is at 1314 T St.; in 1914 he is at 19 Q NW; ditto in 1919. In 1909 the Ellington family was at 1200 T; in 1923 they are at 1212 T, so still in the neighborhood.

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1920-1925: Mercer Cook at Amherst College, 1920-1925; he took a year off in there (1923-1924, I think). Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, and Phi Beta Kappa.

1923, in January: Mercer sang tenor in the choir of Grace Church (NY Age, January 13, 1923, p. 7), probably just while home on winter break, or is this during a year off in 1922-1923?

NB: Ellington moves to NYC in 1923.

1923, in March: In 1940, Mercer Cook writes an article for The Crisis that remembers the Clef Club tour that his father produced immediately upon his return from four years in Europe (Mercer Cook, "'De Lawd' and Jazz: An Incident in the Life of Richard B. Harrison," The Crisis 47/4 (April 1940), pp. 112, 114); he got to hang out at the rehearsals that were in progress at the old Clef Club headquarters on 53rd street, and apparently Ellington dropped in there when he got to NYC.

1923, in September: Mercer is a member of Omega Psi Phi fraternity, and participates in NYC entertainments held by the Epsilon Chapter on September 8 at which Bernice Wilson is present (NY Age, September 29, 1923, p. 8).

1924, in April: The New York studio of Mercer's father, Will Marion Cook, is at 232 W. 138th Street, and son Mercer entertains friends there, including Daisy White, Bernice Wilson, Luella Moses, Ethel Moses, Percy Andrews, Charles Gilmer, Rudolph Holcombe, and Dick Thomas (Chicago Defender, April 12, 1924, p. 9).

1925, in June: Mercer Cook and Frederick Johnson, brothers of Omega Psi Phi Frat, were honored at a banquet on June 23 at the Hotel Dumas by their Frat brothers (NY Age, June 27, 1925, p. 10).

1925, in June: Mercer married Bernice Wilson on June 24, 1925. She is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Wilson of the Dunbar Garden Apartments at 2588 Seventh Avenue (about ten blocks north of Strivers' Row). A black debutante, she was well known socially in black society; their wedding was a big deal. They are part of the "younger set" of African American elite of New York, Baltimore, and Washington (NY Age, July 25, 1925, p. 3)

1925, in July: Mercer attended the Sorbonne in Paris in 1925-1926 on a \$1,000 scholarship. The just-married couple sailed July 19 (Pittsburg Courier, July 26, 1925, p. 6). He earns a diploma there: University of Paris, Ecole de Preparation de Professeurs des français a l'etranger, on a Simpson Fellowship, and earned a Teacher's Diploma.

1925, in the fall: while at school in Paris, Mercer finds the time to act on stage as a member of the Bootlegger's Quartette in La revue nègre, his family's show, so to speak, and he also helped out troupe members behind the scenes.

1926: He returned to the US with Bernice on August 9, 1926. They were entertained by the Debutante's Club when they returned from Paris (NY Age, August 21, 1926, p. 10)

1926-1927: Prof. of French and English at Agricultural and Technical College, Greensboro, NC

SONG: "Ups and Downs," lyrics Mercer Cook, music Will Marion Cook (in ms at Howard)

1927-1936: Howard University, eight years, 1927-1936, with a year off on sabbatical. An older colleague, Alain Locke, was at Howard from 1918 to 1953; friend Sterling Brown taught there from 1929-1969.

1927-1928

1928, January: Mr. and Mrs. Mercer Cook spent the holidays in NYC and have returned South (NY Age, January 7, 1928, p. 10)

SONG: "You are the girl of my dreams, I Love You," words and music Will Mercer Cook (LoC copyright 5 March 1928; copyright renewed 7 March 1955)

1928-1929

1929, in February: Bernice died in a car crash on Sunday, February 17, 1929, on her way to a funeral. This tragedy draws the top-of-page-one banner headline in the very next NY Age (NY Age, February 23, 1929, p. 1): "Will Marion Cook's Daughter-in-Law Dead in Accident"

#### SONGS:

"Homely Girls," Mercer Cook (1929; at Howard)

"Honey I Loves You, Dats All," Will Marion Cook, with Mercer Cook and Alston Burleigh, the son of Harry Burleigh (in ms at Howard; possibly from 1929)

"Troubled in Mind--Negro Spiritual," lyrics Mercer Cook, music arranged and adapted by Will Marion Cook (NY: Schirmer, 1929; also in ms at Howard)

"In between: Entre nous," words Mercer Cook; music, Mercer Cook, Lenoir Cook, and Alston Burleigh (NY: Broadway Music corporation, 1929; LoC copyright October 18, 1929)

"Harlem Band," words and melody only; words, Mercer Cook, music Lenoir Cook and Will Marion Cook, unpubl.; LoC copyright October 1/5, 1929

"Sweetheart I Love You," words and music Lenoir Cook and Mercer Cook (NY: Shapiro, Bernstein & Co., 1929); LoC copyright November 19/20, 1929

#### 1929-1930

1929, in August: Mercer remarried, six months after the loss of his first wife, on August 31, 1929, to Vashti Smith (1910-1969). Vashti was born in Baltimore, Maryland on May 9, 1910 to Maryland parents and was about 7 years younger than Mercer. She was educated at Howard and Spellman and the University of Paris, and worked in the DC public school system. Very possibly they met at Howard, and she continued her education in Paris and when they went to Atlanta.

Mercer's kids with second wife are Mercer, jr. (May 31, 1930 - ) and Jacques (March 19, 1946 - ). Will Marion Cook knew the elder but not the younger grandson. Both boys became Amherst graduates like their father.

1930-1934

1931: working on MA; receives the MA in French from Brown

1931, in June: Mercer and family accompany Will Marion Cook on a trip from Asheville to NYC (NY Age, July 4, 1931, p. 6)

1932, spring through fall: from 1931 into 1932, Countee Cullen worked on a dramatization of Arne Bontemps' 1931 novel, God Sends Sunday, and from this point of departure, plans were afoot to produce a new musical comedy or folk opera adapted from Cullen's spoken play, with lyrics by Mercer Cook, and music and production and direction by Will Marion Cook, under the name St. Louis Woman. Problems ensued with the dialogue. Mercer, in some reports identified as the author, presumably worked on the libretto, and Sterling Brown was called in to provide a rewrite. By the end of September, the show that once had been anticipated to open in New York in September, star Fredi Washington, Mantan Moreland, and Jimmy Baskett, and employ 150 actors and actresses, was dead in the water.

1932-1933: a burst of songs, most often with Mercer providing lyrics for the (white) pianist-composer J. Russel Robinson (1892-1963); Mercer also works with his cousin Hartwell. One of this group of songs was a big hit, namely "Stop the Sun." The song "A Little Bit of Heaven" also became a major success.

## SONGS

"A Little Bit of Heaven Called Home," words Mercer Cook, music Will Marion Cook (NY: Schirmer, 1933, 1939); (also in ms at Howard)

"For cryin' out loud," words Mercer Cook; melody, Hartwell Cook (copyright 1932)

"Georgia Lee and Me," words Mercer Cook, music J. Russel Robinson (NY: De Sylva, Brown and Henderson, 1932; LoC copyright 31 August 1932; copyright renewed September 1959)



- "Harlem is Hell," words Mercer Cook, music Will Marion Cook; unpublished, but copyrighted by Will Marion Cook in 1932 (in ms at Howard)
- "Hold up your hands: in the name of the law of love," lyrics Mercer Cook and Thomas Blandford, music J. Russel Robinson (NY: Marlo Music, 1932); recorded by Elsie Carlisle and Sam Brown in March 1933 for Decca.
- "How can I hi-de-hi when I feel so low-de-low," words and music by Mercer Cook, Don Redman, and J. Russel Robinson (NY: De Sylva, Brown and Henderson, 1932)
- "I bet nobody ever heard a song like this," words Mercer Cook and Rusk Smith, music J. Russel Robinson (NY: De Sylva, Brown and Henderson, 1932)
- "Is I in love? I is," lyrics Mercer Cook, music J. Russel Robinson (NY: De Sylva, Brown and Henderson, 1932; Paris: Chappell, 1933)
- "Old Joe Blade," lyrics Mercer Cook, music J. Russel Robinson and D. J. La Rocca (1932)
- "Roamin' For Romance," lyrics Mercer Cook, music J. Russel Robinson (NY: De Sylva, Brown and Henderson, 1932)
- "Stop the Sun, Stop the Moon: my gal's gone: fox trot" (also "my man's gone"), words and music J. Russel Robinson, Mercer Cook and Hartwell "Harty" Cook (NY: De Sylva, Brown, and Henderson, 1932); introduced by Connie Boswell.
- "Sweet Sweetheart," words, Mercer Cook; melody, Hartwell Cook (copyright 1933)
- "Sweetest Little Feller," words, Mercer Cook; melody, Hartwell Cook (copyright 1933)

1934, May: Mercer's three-year old son, Mercer, jr. is one of three boys and three girls to receive May baskets at the White House from Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt on May 1, in honor of Child Health Day (NY Age, May 12, 1934, p. 1); a picture from this event, with the six kids and Eleanor Roosevelt, is widely distributed by the AP

1934-1935

1934-35: in France for a year at the University of Paris, on sabbatical, on a General Education Board Fellowship; returned in July 1935.

1935-1936

1936: during his last year at Howard, the work done during the prior year's sabbatical now allows him to complete his doctorate for Brown University in French (MA 1930-1931, PhD 1936)

1936-1943

1936: Doctorate in hand, Mercer Cook takes on the position of Professor of French at Atlanta University for seven years, 1936-1943, beginning with the 1936 Summer Session. (NY Age, May 9, 1936, p. 3)

Mercer's father is relatively nearby in Asheville, and possibly Mercer's arrival spurs Will Marion Cook's trip through the Carolinas and Georgia.

1938: Rosenwald Fellowship

1939: "Because of You," Mercer Cook and Benny Carter (1939; at Howard)

1941: "Let's Save the U.S.A., to Hell with Over There," lyrics Mercer Cook and grandson Mercer II, music Will Marion Cook (in ms. at Howard)

1942, summer: Abbie Mitchell is on the staff of the Atlanta University Summer School of the Theatre (Plaindealer (KC), June 12, 1942, p. 6); she acts with son Mercer and grandson, Mercer, jr., and granddaughter Marion in a summer theatrical production of White Oaks running July 9, 10, 11 in Atlanta that thus features three generations of Cooks (Baltimore Afro American, July 11, 1942, p. 10; Philadelphia Tribune, July 11, 1942, p. 2; Chicago Defender, July 11, 1942, p. 7)

1942: General Education Board Fellowship to University of Havana

1943-1945: Haiti English-Teaching Project and Professor of English at University of Haiti, 1943-1945; Supervisor of English Teaching at the University of Haiti

1943, in December: Will Marion Cook moves to Port-au-Prince, Haiti, to be near his son Mercer and is soon hospitalized at Saint Francois de Sales Hospital.

1944, in March: Will Marion Cook returns to US; en route to his home in NYC from Port-au-Prince, he stops in Baltimore and immediately enters the hospital with a stomach ailment picked up in Haiti (Baltimore Afro American, March 25, 1944, p. 15).

1944, in July: Mercer's father Will Marion Cook is in Harlem Hospital from 21 June and dies on July 19.

1945-1960

1945: Mercer returns to the US from after two years away in Haiti, and assumes a position at Howard again, as professor of Romance Languages, 1945-1960.

1946: second son, Jacques, born in DC.

Ambassador to Niger, 1961-1964.

Ambassador to Senegal, 1964-1966.

Ambassador to Gambia, 1965-1966.

1966-1970

1966-1970: Mercer leaves the US diplomatic service and returns to Howard for his last four years of teaching; he heads the romance languages department

1969: visiting professor at Harvard

1969: death of wife Vashti Smith Cook, who leaves two sons and five grandchildren.

1970-1987: Retirement.

1987, in October: Mercer Cook died October 4, 1987, age 84. [Howard finding list has October 6, 1987, but that is the date of the newspaper articles announcing his death.]

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#### OTHER SONGS:

- "Ducky Wucky," lyrics Mercer Cook (in ms at Howard) (possibly with Mercer lyrics for the 1935 Duke Ellington foxtrot of this name)
- "Honey I Loves You, Dats All," Will Marion Cook, with Mercer Cook and Alston Burleigh, the son of Harry Burleigh (in ms at Howard; possibly from 1929)
- "Over Here," lyrics Mercer Cook, music Will Marion Cook (in ms at Howard); related to 1941 song, as above?

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Mercer Cook deposited his papers at Howard University. They contain not only material on his life and career, but also have unique documentation of the lives and careers of his parents, Will Marion Cook and Abbie Mitchell. A 34-page finding aid for his papers, prepared in 1992, was mounted on-line by Howard University's Manuscript Division in 2015. This finding aid has very useful biographical data and bibliographic references. See

[http://dh.howard.edu/finaid\\_manu](http://dh.howard.edu/finaid_manu)

## **SOME ADDRESSES FOR COOK AND HIS FAMILY**

### Addresses in Washington, DC

1870 US Census and 1880 US Census: the family address was east of 7th Street on the Howard campus.

Cook memoir (Carter thesis, p. 391) says Cook's father bought a house at 16th and M.

### **1724 8th St.**

1888/1890/1892: James H. Howard, physician and war department clerk, is at 1724 8th St. NW between R and S in 1888, 1890, 1892 DC city directories; John H. Cook is there in 1890 as student. (There may be a distinction to draw between professional offices and private home here, but in effect this was the family home in DC for Will Marion Cook for most of over 30 years---with a gap of around 14 years---from the time he returned from Germany up to his mother's death.)

The Howard/Cook family appears to have moved to near 4th and Pomeroy by 1893 and been there for a decade or more, but then back to 1724 8th by 1908. In directories, James H. Howard is at 350 Pomeroy in 1893 to 1906, at least. In the 1900 Census James and Belle Howard are at 350 Pomeroy. This is the residence of his parents John and Rebecca Howard, and also of his sister Martha and her kids.

NB Isabel Howard, a.k.a. Belle M. Howard turns up in different places in the city directories, and as teacher, dress maker, etc. She teaches sewing at Howard. Could there have been a marital separation for a while in the 1890s?

The house at 1724 8th St. NW (8 rooms, unfurnished) is for rent in 1899 for a high amount, \$31.50, compared to other properties listed (Washington Evening Star, June 24, 1899, p. 4; Washington Evening Star, August 5, 1899, p. 5)

1908: James H. Howard and Belle are back at 1724 8th St. by 1908, and remain there until after her death in 1923. They are there with Will Marion Cook kids in 1910 US Census.

1913: Will Marion Cook, "musician," is in the Washington city directory for 1913 at 1724 8th St. NW.

1914: Abbie is staying with her mother-in-law Mrs. Cook at 1724 Eighth St. in DC in early June. Note "Mrs. Cook" for Belle Howard.

1921: Will Marion Cook gives the 1724 8th St. address when he returns to NYC on March 16, 1921.

### **2232 6th Street, DC**

Cook's brother John was at 2232 6th St. NW for several years in the mid to later 1890s, up through 1897 and 1898 directories, essentially on the Howard campus, a couple of short blocks from his mother, and this is where Cook and Dunbar could have written Clorindy in the basement (and Mother Isabel is there in the 1895 and 1898 directories), unless the writing of Clorindy postdates the move down the block to 2224. Will Marion Cook is recorded at this address in the Orpheus Glee Club Directory of Colored People in 1894 (cit. Carter thesis, p. 360).

Will Marion Cook is surely the individual called for jury duty in late 1897. It is the Will Marion Cook at 2236 6th St. who is called (and this locale is Dunbar's home address in the 1900 Census).

### **2224 6th Street, DC**

Then John moves to 2224 6th St. NW; probably from 1898. John Cook is at the 2224 6th St. address in the 1899 directory and the 1900 Census, and etc., for many years thereafter. Isabel Howard is still at 2224 6th St. in 1905 (in an Oberlin list of graduates) and in the 1906 city directory. John H. Cook gets a building permit for repair work estimated at \$1500

on 2224 6th St. NW in 1916 (Washington Evening Star, October 3, 1916, p. 15).

Will Marion Cook is surely the individual called for jury duty in early 1898: it is the Wm. M. Cook at 2224 C St., which is very likely to be an error for 2224 6th St., i.e., at his brother's.

1919-1923: For the four years when Will Marion Cook was abroad, he virtually always gave his permanent home address on travel documents as 2224 6th Street, NW, Washington, DC. This is actually the home address of older brother John, spouse Julie, and kids Louise and Lenoir. It is 2224 6th St. in the 1920 US Census, with John age 52, Julie age 45, Louise age 18 and Lenoir age 12. This address is within the modern campus of Howard University. This was also the address given for Mrs. James Howard, i.e. mother of Will Marion Cook, in 75th Anniversary Oberlin catalogue of 1908. [Carter bio., p. 52, gives brother John's address as 2294 Sixth Street in 1900, but US 1900 Census has it as 2224 6th St.]. As late as 1923, Will Marion Cook gives the 2224 6th St. address when he arrives back in NYC on February 7, 1923 (just before mother Belle dies).

### **2260 6th Street, DC**

After many years at 2224 6th street, John and Louise moved to 2260 6th Street sometime before the US 1930 Census.

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### **NEIGHBORS**

ADAMS: Wellington A. Adams's Columbia Academy and Conservatory of Music was located at 1911 9th St. NW, not far away from the Cook family home.

### **DUNBAR:**

Based in his hometown of Dayton, OH until 1896, Paul Lawrence Dunbar then moves to NYC. When Dunbar returned from England to DC

in August 1897, he first stayed with Howard English professor Prof. Kerry Miller and his family at the Miller home on the Howard campus. That would have been something like 2356 6th St. NW, where Miller lived in 1891 and 1892, or 430 College Street (on the 2300 block between 4th and 5th St. NW). Both of these addresses are very close to John Cook on 6th St., and to where Dunbar was in 1900.

Paul L. Dunbar was in the 1898 and 1899 Washington city directory at 1934 4th St. in the LaDroit Park neighborhood SE of Howard University in the house he bought by November, 1897 and in which he established his mother, and to which he brought his bride; he lived there with Alice from 1898 until their separation in early 1902, though he had lengthy stays elsewhere, e.g., Colorado and the Catskills, for his health.

Dunbar and wife Alice are at 2236 6th Street in the US 1900 Census, very near John Cook.

NB: Will Marion Cook, living at 2236 6th St., is called for jury duty in late 1897. John Cook was at 2232 6th Street, and then at 2224 6th Street, in 1897 and 1898, during just the time frame when Dunbar helped write Clorindy in John's basement in the fall of 1897.

### **Dunbar and Cook**

Dunbar and Cook are "the colored Gilbert and Sullivan" in a 1902 interview for a newspaper article, at the time of In Dahomey.

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The lyrics and dramatic plays and librettos of Will Marion Cook's friend and close contemporary Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906) make up a small and relatively neglected fraction of his copious output. A large portion of this fraction is a product of his relationship with Cook over 1893-1902, a friendship and collaboration that Dunbar scholars mostly have left unexplored.

Conversely, Cook is also involved with projects independent of his Dunbar collaborations during these years, while Dunbar does an opera with Coleridge-Taylor and songs with J. R. Johnson.

The bare bones of Dunbar's life and its intersection with Cook follow here. Big issues to clarify in every case are Dunbar's role in



each production as librettist and/or lyricist, and how many items are actually newly provided. Note that Clorindy and Cannibal King are both in the air by 1895/1896.

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## DUNBAR

- 1872-1893 Childhood through high school and brief early employment career in Dayton, Ohio.
- 1889: by this year he had published poems in local papers
- 1892 At age 20, "discovered" by James Whitcomb Riley, who wrote him a letter of encouragement.
- 1893 Worked in Chicago during the Fair, at first in menial positions and then as clerk for Frederick Douglass in the Haiti building. He read a poem on Negro American Day on Will Marion Cook's program. Cook knew Frederick Douglass and his grandson, the violinist Joseph Douglass, very well, and Cook was the driving force behind Colored Americans Day. Cook's manuscript memoir recalls that Douglass introduced him there to Dunbar. (Carter bio, p. 38)
- 1893-1896 back in Dayton, writing up a storm.
- 1895 Dunbar and Cook have contract with Witmark for Clorindy (Carter bio., p. 38; Peress, p. 49); Witmark later publishes the hit songs from the 1898 production (Carter bio., p. 43)
- 1896-1897 move to NYC, with much literary touring into early 1897. Hangs out in later 1896 at Williams and Walker apartment in NYC with Cook, Burleigh, and others. This is near Jimmie Marshall's hotel on West 53rd Street, a center of African American theatrical activity, where Bob Cole and Billy Johnson, and the Johnson brothers lived. Gets engaged. Seems that Cook pushed the Clorindy project to little result.
- 1897, in England for about six months from mid-February through late July, leaving February 6 and returning in August; collaborates with Samuel Coleridge Taylor on "The Dream Lovers: An Operatic Romance," publ. in 1898 by Boosey
- 1897-1902: returns to US and settles in DC; these are the years of closest collaboration with Will Marion Cook; James Rosamond Johnson was another close friend of Dunbar, and they collaborated on songs in 1902 and 1903. (See WorldCat

and JWJ memoirs, Along This Way.) After his return from England, Dunbar lived and worked in Washington, DC. Clerkship at Library of Congress for about two years or so, October 1, 1897- December 31, 1898 or 1899, interrupted by illness and recuperation in Catskills and Colorado.

- 1897: Clorindy. Probably in the first couple of weeks after arriving back from England. Clorindy, or The Origin of the Cakewalk, finally actually written, in Washington, DC, in the basement of Will's brother John. Probably before he started to work in October. Dunbar book presumably for W&W, Dunbar book for Hogan, and Dunbar lyrics, and Cook music. Clorindy was first produced in the summer of 1898 with his lyrics but without Dunbar dialogue.
- 1898, March: Dunbar married Alice on March 6, 1898, during hiatus with fate of Clorindy undecided. Cook is in NYC as an associate editor of The Prospect. Dunbar and James Whitcomb Riley are to collaborate on a comic opera with music by Cook. Idea comes to nothing, but plants seeds, evidently. [NB: James Whitcomb Riley was pretty much a life-long Hoosier. He "discovered" Dunbar in 1892 as above and wrote him letters of recommendation.]
- 1898, end of summer: Clorindy revised into Senegambian Carnival for the fall, with characters Dollar Bill and Silver King.
- 1898, end of year: Senegambian Carnival revised into A Lucky Coon in December 1898, which Brooks (Lost Sounds, p. 108) and Forbes (Williams bio) says is also Dunbar and Cook. Further exploits of Dollar Bill and Silver King.
- 1899, early: The Cannibal King, a musical comedy or negro opera with book by well-known librettist Hugh Morton, lyrics by Dunbar, and music by Cook, to be produced by Lederer.
- 1900: "Down de Lovers' Lane" for Casino Girl, Cook & Dunbar; re-used in Jes Lak
- 1900, June: Jes Lak White Fo'ks. Dunbar book and lyrics, and Cook music. Book survives. By one report, though, it is Cook who wrote the dialogue.
- 1900, December: Uncle Eph's Christmas. Dunbar book and lyrics, and Cook music. Book survives.
- 1901, July: Dunbar and Joseph Douglass were bathing in Atlantic City.

1901, across the year: The Cannibal King. Now with Dunbar/J.W. Johnson book, perhaps some Cole and J.R. Johnson lyrics, and Cook music. In my understanding of the "Cannibal King project," this is really two versions, late 1900-early 1901 and Spring and summer 1901. Smith, in Bert Williams bio., p. 49, says Dunbar quit in the middle of writing the show and the Johnson brothers and Bob Cole completed the libretto. Carter bio (p.57) says that discord between Cole and Cook led to unfinished show. But it did get completed. The LoC Act I libretto got bloated to full length at the point when only one act was written; but a scenario for the two-act show survives in an October 1891 newspaper, which credits the book to Dunbar and J. W. Johnson. Cole is credited along with JWJ for the Act I LoC libretto, but not this finished book.

1902, in summer: the next Cook/dunbar show, a My Friend From Georgia project, is floated about but comes to nothing. Might have been thought to be the next show after In Dahomey, or very possibly Cook and Dunbar could not get to it on account of In Dahomey.

1902, in September. In Dahomey. Book by Jesse Shipp, with some songs with Dunbar lyrics and Cook music. The last iteration of the Cannibal King project. The only brand-new songs with Dunbar lyrics seem to be: "Good Evenin'," "Emancipation Day," "Returned"; nonetheless, Dunbar is always given in contemporary accounts as the credited lyricist for the show; but note that some older songs---from 1901---finally had their premiere now. Abbie sings "Returned" at Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt's Newport theatre party.

Cannibal King may still be in play, distinct from In Dahomey, in early 1903. A Cook reference then in Theatre Magazine to a colored author in the singular may indicate Dunbar.

Thus, the Cook/Dunbar collaboration generated essentially one or more shows per year across 1898/1899/1900/1901/1902, with ever-evolving material that culminated in In Dahomey. All done during Dunbar's early married years, the Washington, DC years, before the full collapse of his health and marriage due to drinking

and TB. By one report (James Weldon Johnson), Dunbar angrily broke with Cook and/or with theatre, but is this after Cannibal King before In Dahomey, or after In Dahomey, or when? Was it a rupture that blew over, or was it more permanent? Cook is remembered as a close, warm, devoted friend of Dunbar, and continues to set Dunbar lyrics. As late as mid 1904 he is reported to hope to be able to write an grand opera with Dunbar (see below).

Across the years of their closest collaboration, from 1898 to 1903, on the literary side, Dunbar published numerous individual essays, stories articles, poems (and he lectured):

The Uncalled (first novel, 1898)

Folks From Dixie (first collection of short stories, 1898)

with Samuel Coleridge Taylor, "The Dream Lovers: An Operatic Romance," 1897, publ. 1898; C-T also set 7 Dunbar lyrics in 1897

Lyrics of the Hearthside (poems, 1899)

Poems of Cabin and Field (poems, 1899)

The Strength of Gideon, and other stories (second coll. of stories, 1900)

The Love of Landry (second novel, 1900)

The Sport of the Gods (fourth and final publ. novel, completed Nov. 7, 1900; published 1902)

The Fanatics (third novel, 1901)

Candle Lightin' Time (poems, 1901)

In a letter to his mother in April 1902 he says he's written lots of new lyrics and plays

When Malindy Sings (poems, 1903)

In Old Plantation Days (poems, 1903)

Lyrics of Love and Laughter (poems, 1903)

1902-03: New Year's Day, 1902 invitation to White House; after separation from his wife Alice in January 1902, she moves to Wilmington, Del.; Dunbar is constantly traveling and lecturing; he moves his home base from DC to NYC (In Dahomey in September 1902) and then briefly moves to Chicago (where his brothers are) at 3209 Dearborn, where

his disease flares up in mid 1903, and then he moves back to Dayton for nursing, then to NYC, with improvement and travelling circa December 1903, and then home again to Dayton; Dunbar is expected in St. Louis in March 1904, but also cancellations due to illness. Apparently not back to Dayton permanently until 1904 (or from 1903 but with still lots of travelling). He is widely reported to be critically ill in Dayton in September 1904.

1903/04-1906 Living at mother's home in Dayton until early death

1904: Column "The Matinee Girl" in NY Dramatic Mirror, June 4, 1904, p. 2, says of Cook, "He is a warm friend of Paul Lawrence Dunbar, the negro poet. Their magnum opus, they say, will be a grand opera." So, by this account, anyway, they are still evidently pals after In Dahomey.

1904: Cook "hopes some day to have a grand opera produced with a libretto by Paul Laurence Dunbar, the colored poet" (Boston Herald, Sunday, August 28, 1904, p. 22)

1904: Song "Dreamin' town" ("Mandy Lou") is set by Cook; lyric had been published by Dunbar in Century Magazine, December 1903, p. 270; shortly, Cecil Mack would pen a new lyric on the Dunbar model for The Southerners

1905: At the end of 1905, in November, when Cook returns briefly to NYC, he has just finished a song, "When Melinda Sings" (NY Morning Telegraph, November 20, 1905, p. 10); presumably this is "When Malinda/Melinda Sings," to the verses by Dunbar of 1903

1906: Dunbar dies on February 9, 1906 almost exactly four years after his marital separation.

1906: At time of the poet's death, the Freeman called Will Marion Cook "The late Paul L. Dunbar's devoted friend" (Indianapolis Freeman, February 24, 1906, p. 7).

1906 Abyssinia has a "grand and diversified score of music composed and arranged by Prof. Will Marion Cooke, the late Paul Dunbar's protege" (Indianapolis Freeman, March 3, 1906, p. 5)

1906: Cook sets Dunbar lyric in "A Summah Night" (a lyric that Dunbar had first published ca. 1898 and had re-published recently, ca. 1905, in The Century)

1914: Cook sets a Dunbar lyric in "My Lady" (publ. Schirmer)

1916, in October: on October 2, Dunbar High in DC opened its doors, and was formally dedicated in events over the week of January 15 to 19, 1917; it is a new building on 1st St. NW between N and O, and it is an outgrowth of the M Street High School, which is called its predecessor and which itself became a junior high school.

ELLINGTON 1917-1918: In the 1917 city directory, the Ellington family headed by dad James Edward Ellington, a butler, was across the street and just down the block at 1703 8th St. NW from Belle Howard's house (where Mercer and his sister Marion lived while going to high school); apparently, the Ellington's lived there for about a year, 1917-1918. Edward and Edna are dating at this time, and their son Mercer (names for Mercer Cook) was conceived in 1918 before the wedding; Edna may have known Mercer Cook through Dunbar High. The Ellington newlyweds moved to 1955 3rd street NW.

EUROPE: The Europe family lived at 1705 8th St. NW in 1893-1898, until death of father Henry J. Europe, a few doors from the Howard/Cook family (unless they were not on the block in those years). Moving around for a while, the family was at 1008 S. NW between R and S (mom Lorraine, and kids Ida, James, John, and Mary) by 1913 and there in 1919 and onward. This is still very close---just two blocks away due west, not even 1000 feet away, from the Howard/Cooks.

### **Addresses in Chicago**

1892: Cook's letter to the Detroit Plaindealer of October 21, 1892, p. 000, concerning his opera gives his address at No. 3123 Dearborn Street, Chicago (cit. Karl Gert zur Heide and Abbott & Seroff, Out of Sight, p. 237).

### **Addresses in NYC**

1900: Will Marion Cook living on 6th Ave. in NYC near 29th St. (Carter bio., p. 53).

1905: Will, Abbie, and their two children are in the 1905 NY State Census at 154 W. 62nd Street with Isabelle Howard.

1905: after birth of Marion, but in fact sometime around now, he and Abbie are part of black art and music community moving up from the 20s and 30s into the Manhattantown neighborhood around West 98th and West 99th Streets, where neighbors include the Johnson brothers, etc. (lots of Google hits on Cook and Manhattantown); Carter bio. (p. 53) says this is at 10 1/2 W. 99th St. ca. 1900. The entire district was razed for urban renewal in 1951.

1905, in July: Abbie, the kids, and both mothers have just moved up to Manhattantown at 20 West 99th St. between Columbus Ave. and Central Park West in July (a fortnight ago, acc. NY Morning Telegraph, Saturday, August 5, 1905, p. 10).

1906, in March: Cook writes a letter to the editor dated March 26, 1906, from 20 West 99th St. (New York Morning Telegraph, n.d., n.p. [late March, 1906])

1906: Cook's copyright statement on the 1910 song "Whoop Her Up" gives his professional address at 136 West 37th Street in NYC.

1910: Abbie, the kids, and Alice are at 25 W. 99th St. between Columbus and Central Park West in the 1910 US Census.

NY Age reference to guests of Alice V. Payne (NY Age, August 25, 1910, p. 7) also gives 25 W. 99th St.

Carter bio (p. 53) says 10 1-2 W. 99th (implying in 1900), and 1905 papers give 20 W. 99th. They may have moved a bit on the same block.

1910: Not that the alternative entry in same year's Census has kids with Will Marion Cook parents in DC at 1724 8th St.

1910: Will Marion Cook, "William M. Cook," "composer of music," is a lodger at 148 W. 52nd St. in the 1910 US Census; he is living with orchestral musician Daniel E. Murray. This is probably the Daniel (Dannie) Evans

Murray (1880-1916), of a distinguished Washington, DC family, who studied violin at Oberlin and then worked in NYC with James Reese Europe and others.

## **Up to Harlem**

### **135 W. 135th**

1915: Abbie, Alice, Josephine Jefferson, and Mercer are at 135 W. 135th St. in the 1915 NY State Census. This appears to be the first big move up to Harlem for them. Remember that Marion (I think) and Mercer (I'm sure) are in DC for high school, so ca. 1913-1917 and 1916-1920. Marion could already be in DC in 1915, and thus not in the NY Census.

1917: Will Marion Cook is at the 135 W. 135th St. address, acc. NYC directory.

### **146 W. 124<sup>th</sup>**

1919: In December, Josephine Middleton writes "an affidavit for a relative" for Abbie's passport application. Josephine gives her home address as 146 W. 124<sup>th</sup> St.

1920: In the US Census, Alice (widowed) lives at 146 W. 124th, and also Abbie Mitchell and Aunt Josephine Middleton and John A. Middleton are in the same building. They evidently moved here at some point between 1915 and 1920. If Will Marion Cook and Abbie are on the outs, then perhaps he moved in at 135 W. 135th in 1917 with them, or at the time when they moved to 124th St.

1922: NYC directory has Alice at 146 W. 124th; and Abbie also there (actually at 145 W. 124th in one and 146 W. 124th in a duplicate); further, in Abbie's 1922 passport application applied for in London on 9 March 1922 and issued April 4, she gives this address as her home in NYC.



1924: Will M. Cook (Mercer, presumably), Alice V. Payne, Josephine Middleton, John a. Middleton, and Will. M. Cook, Sr. (Will Marion Cook, presumably) all live at 146 W. 124th Street according to the New York Voter List.

1925: The whole household is at 146 W. 124th Street. Alice is head, age 70, hence born ca. 1855, with Louis Douglas, 34, grandchild Marion Douglas, 25, and their daughter Marion, age 5, plus grandson Mercer, age 22, and cousins Hartwell, age 22, and Louise, age 18. Address in census and also in 1925 NYC directory. Passenger list ref to Louis and Marion Douglass has them going to 146 W. 124th to live. Aunt Josephine also still lives in this building. Not Abbie or Will Marion Cook, or nephew Lenoir, though.

## **STRIVER'S ROW HOUSES**

These buildings were only released for sale to blacks around 1918/1919.

### **221 W. 138th**

1918-1944: A claim was made that Will Marion Cook lived on Strivers' Row at 221 W. 138th St. ("the "Will Marion Cook" house) from 1918 to 1944. It is a U.S. National Historic Landmark and on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places. See Wikipedia, etc. This is now hard or impossible to credit. Note, though, that daughter Marion A. Cook clearly gives 221 W. 138th as her father's address and also her address in NYC on her May 1919 passport application. Further, 1919 is when Cora Parchment also is living at that address (NY Sun, May 28, 1919, p. 15; NY Age, May 31, 1919, p. 1). This is a year before Cora is recorded at 321 West 138<sup>th</sup> Street. However, there is no Will Marion Cook at that address in the 1920 or 1930 or 1940 US Census, and others live at that address and own the building (as below). Moreover, the building is not in Cook's will or estate. In fact, house-by-house, block-by-block New York City real estate records provide ample proof that the house was owned by other folks from 1919 to the 1940s, and do newspaper hits. So, he seems to have been a renter there in 1919, or 1918-1919. That's all. No Striver's Row house is in Cook's will.

1919: NYC real estate records establish the sale of 221 W. 138<sup>th</sup> to Douglas B. Johnson in 1919. The address in the ledgers at the Manhattan City Register Office, 66 John Street, NY, NY 10038, 13th Floor, is Block 02024, Lot 0021.

1919: Dr. Douglas Beverly Johnson (1888-1925) purchases 221 West 138th Street from William Renkin (NY Tribune, July 2, 1919, p. 19; NY Sun, July 3, 1919, p. 11; NY Age, July 3, 1919, p. 11). He marries in 1920 (NY Age, May 22, 1920, p. 2; NY Age, May 29, 1920, p. 3), and they will live at 221 W. 138th. His wife is Myrtle Lillian Capehart (1898-1989). He and his family are at this address in the 1925 NYS Census. Their four-year old daughter Geraldine dies suddenly in 1925 (NY Age, April 18, 1925, p. 10). Johnson himself dies suddenly later in 1925 (NY Age, November 14, 1925, p. 3: "Dr. Douglas B. Johnson Dies From Operation," he was 37 years old; he served with the 369<sup>th</sup> as a First Lieutenant [NB: the same regiment and rank as James Reese Europe]; he was on the staff at Harlem Hospital; wife Myrtle and two children, Marie and Myrtle, survive.) Mrs. Douglas B. Johnson, widow, gives up her residence in NYC and moves to her former home in Raleigh, NC (Pittsburgh Courier, August 21, 1921, p. 6). She retains ownership of the building. In 1934, her father, Dr. L. B. Capehart, sr., of Raleigh, NC, moves to NYC to practice medicine and locates his office at 221 W. 138th St (NY Age, October 20, 1934, p. 2). She remarries, to Dr. Maurice Howard, and they move into the building, where they are living at the time of the US 1940 Census.

### **232 W. 138th St.**

This is the Spiller and Taliaferro house at 232 W. 138th Street:

1924: Will Marion Cook studio is at 232 W. 138th Street and son Mercer entertains friends there, including Daisy White, Bernice Wilson, Luella Moses, Ethel Moses, Percy Andrews, Charles Gilmer, Rudolph Holcombe, and Dick Thomas (Chicago Defender, April 12, 1924, p. 9)

1925: Will Marion Cook is living uptown from his family at 232 W. 138th St. in 1925 (J.-C. Baker, Hungry Heart, p. 83), the house where William and

Isabelle Spiller live; this is also the address Louis and Marion give when coming back to the US in 1927, 1930, and 1937; seems to be a boarding house, judging by US 1940 Census.

William Spiller (1876-1944). Isabelle (1888-1974) has sister Bessie Taliaferro (1889-1991); [name Spiller is sometimes read from documents as Spieler]; the couple and sister Bessie moved into the building in 1920 (NY Times, September 8, 1988, p. C17); Bessie lived there until her death, and she talked to J.-C. Baker, Phyllis Anderson, etc.; there were Five Musical Spillers, then Six Musical Spillers, then Ten Musical Spillers, from ca. 1908-1925; as ten, they are still on the road in Cleveland and Pittsburgh in July 1925 (Chicago Defender, July 18, 1925, p. 7); evidently sister Bessie was already there and they joined her; she is the one with memories of the revue; seems likely that the Spillers came there themselves in summer 1925, when they went off the road. The Spiller School of Music is set up in the basement, probably in the fall, after rehearsals for "Hotsy-Totsy." William left home and started touring again with an eponymous group ca. 1928.

Phyllis Wynn Anderson. "Isabele Taliaferro Spiller: Harlem Music Educator, 1925-1958." DMA diss., University of Georgia, 1988.

Will Marion Cook lived at 232 W. 138th in 1927 (i.e., at the Spillers), where Louis, Marion, and granddaughter Marion go in June.

[In 1925 Will Marion Cook gives his office as 223 W. 46th St.; see Chicago Defender, November 28, 1925, p. 22]

1930: Louis and Marion return to US and give their address as 232 W. 138th St. (the Spillers)

### **321 W. 138<sup>th</sup> Street**

Cousin Cora Parchment is at 321 W. 138th St. in 1920, 1925, 1931; that is a block west of Striver's Row, near Edgecombe Ave. Her husband is Samuel; and her mother (his mother-in-law, acc. US 1920 Census),

Jennie Jackson, is living with them. Cora owns property in Yonkers (Yonkers Statesman, June 27, 1924, p. 12)

Will Marion Cook's address in 1920, as recorded in his Affidavit of Identifying Witness in Abbie's January 1920 passport application, is 321 West 138<sup>th</sup> Street.

1923: Marion Douglas puts 321 W. 138th St. as her permanent US residence in her 1923 passport application.

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### **A few additional notes:**

1931: Will Marion Cook is at 2370 7th Ave., between 138th and 139th, a Strivers' Row apartment house address, in the 1931 NYC directory (at least, there is a Will M. Cook there).

NB: Cook's funeral was at the Rodney Dale Funeral Home at 2332 Seventh Ave., between 136th and 137th St. (Carter, p. 121).

NB: Jesse A. Shipp's barber shop and billiards parlor was at 2283 7th Ave., between 134th and 135th St. (NY Age, August 20, 1914, n.p. [6]).

References from 1931 to 1942 put Will Marion Cook in Asheville. He is said to be from there, he writes letters from there, it is the town stated on copyright renewals, the local newspaper identifies him as a resident, etc. His 1940 will was made in Atlanta, Ga.

Louis and Marion were living at 364 W. 116th at the time of the death of Louis in May 1941.

In a 1981 interview, Eva Jessye recalled that in his last years Will Marion Cook used the Harlem YMCA as his mailing address. (Baltimore Afro American, October 17, 1981, p. 6); this must have been his NYC postal address for convenience while he lived in Asheville, NC.

A Baltimore Afro American reference gives Will Marion Cook as living on Washington Boulevard in Baltimore.

In a 1946 newspaper article about his will, Will Marion Cook is called "a Baltimorean by adoption" and says he gave his address as 1402 Druid Hill Avenue. That may well have possibly been the home address on the 1940 will (Baltimore Afro American, December 14, 1946, p. 15).

1944: Abbie Mitchell is living at 240 West 112th St. (NY Age, April 29, 1944, p. 4).

1960: In her Times obituary, Abbie Mitchell's home is given as 149 W. 87th St. (NY Times obit).